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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

June 1983

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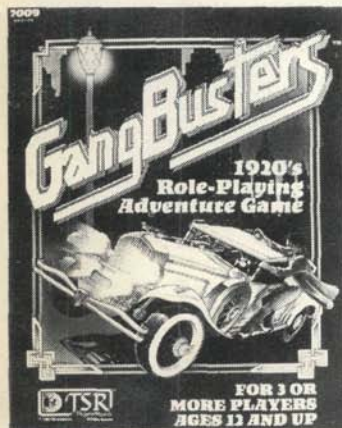
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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN

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THIS IS THE WAY GREAT



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The fog swirled slowly round him, driven by a heavy movement of its own, for of course there was no wind. It hung in poisonous thick coils and loops; it rose and sank; no light penetrated it directly from street lamp or motorcar...



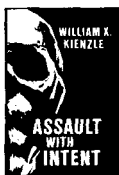
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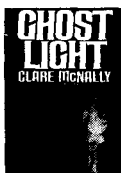
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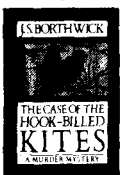
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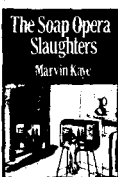
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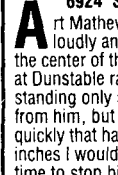
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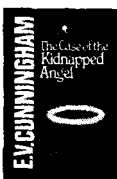
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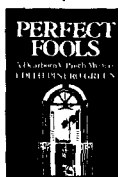
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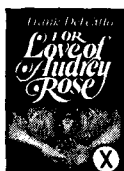


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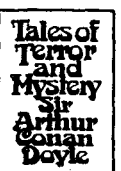


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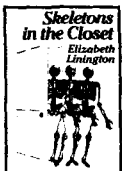
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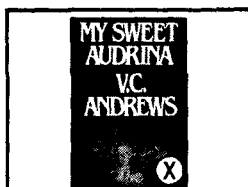
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There was something strange about the house where I grew up. There were shadows in the corners and whispers on the stairs... There was a war going on in our house, a silent war that sounded no guns, and the bodies that fell were only wishes that died.



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RUMPOLE AND THE FASCIST BEAST

by JOHN MORTIMER

“This is where I came in,” I said. “I’ve seen it all before.”
I was sitting one Sunday in front of the gas fire at Casa Rumpole (25B Froxbury Court, Gloucester Road). I was wearing a comfortable old cardigan and carpet slippers and sipping a G and T, but the news in the paper wasn’t comforting. Moreover it was unpleasantly familiar to anyone who made a tentative entrance into life before the First World War and was therefore in time to hear Hitler screeching on the wireless and see newsreels of jackboots marching into Czechoslovakia in preparation for the next.

Britain First Rally in Brixton. Clashes with New Socialist Party. Candidate arrested. As I said to She Who Must Be Obeyed as she came in through the front door with her mackintosh and shopping string-bag weighed down with a few unappetizing-looking goodies, it was all exactly like the bad old days.

“Rumpole! It’s good news,” said Hilda. “I’ve got a tin of mulligatawny soup.”

“Congratulations.” I went on reading the paper. “Fascist marches in London. I know exactly what happens next.”

My wife took her string-bag into the kitchen and left the door

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open as she unpacked her shopping. I shouted my predictions through to her.

"Next comes gas masks. Call-up. The RAF groundstaff." Surely I was getting a bit old for the RAF groundstaff.

"And I managed to find some frozen beefburgers!" She seemed very proud of her Sunday shopping.

"Then they'll give us dried eggs. Whale steak. J. B. Priestley on the wireless. Songs by Dame Vera Lynn." It was an appalling prospect. I dropped the paper and wandered into the kitchen to search out another bottle of gin.

"I had to go all the way down to the tube station." Hilda was pouring tinned mulligatawny soup into a saucepan. I lit a paper spill in the gas and applied it to the end of a small cigar.

"I couldn't stand the whole damn program round again." I puffed out smoke. "I suppose they've got a gramophone record of Churchill's speeches."

"Hardly a white face to be seen down by the tube station. My Aunt Fran would turn in her grave if she could see London nowadays." My wife accepted a large G and T to help her through stirring the tin of soup.

"As I recall it, your Aunt Fran was married to your Uncle Percy Wystan, late Deputy Controller of the Punjabi Railway," I reminded her.

"That is exactly what I mean!"

"She spent her life running up curries and kedgerees, supervising the punka-wallah, organizing tea parties on the backs of elephants. Your Aunt Fran would have been totally at home round our tube station." I looked at Hilda and started to cross-examine her, a daring thing to do to She Who Must Be Obeyed. "You didn't get the supper at Chatterjee's General Stores by any chance?"

"Everywhere else was shut." The witness was on the defensive.

"You don't grudge Mr. Chatterjee a little hospitality, do you? I mean in return for a couple of centuries of putting up with your Aunt Fran?"

Cornered, the witness had to resort to "Don't be so silly, Rumpole"—a sure sign of defeat. I reckoned the score was fifteen-love to me in the first set of the evening.

I had for some time considered taking a pupil, someone to look up law whenever that commodity was needed, or to run round and adjourn things. Perhaps I felt the need of someone to talk to since

my old friend George Frobisher had accepted a minor judgeship and gone off to a Circus Bench somewhere in the general direction of Luton.

Our Inn sent us round a list of names of those anxious to secure a pupilage, together with their life stories (Grimsby Grammar, Captain of Debates, or Eton and Oriel, doesn't wish to be connected with divorce or crime; warmly recommended by the Master of the Rolls). I passed by various candidates until I came to the name of Mr. Lutaf Ali Khan. I rang the Inn and we arranged an appointment at my Chambers for 9:30 one morning. If Mr. Ali Khan was to turn out to be anything like Mr. Chatterjee, Hilda's useful grocer, he would be inclined, I thought, to work industriously, Sunday afternoons included.

When Mr. Khan duly arrived at Chambers I was in conference. He went into the clerk's room and found the usual scene of chaos and overcrowding. Erskine-Brown was collecting papers and grumbling to our clerk Henry about the slow arrival of his fees, and Hoskins, the middle-aged father of four hungry daughters, was having a quick look at a "break and enter" before rushing off to Inner London. Uncle Tom was looking through the obituaries in the *Daily Telegraph*. Dianne and Angela, our new assistant typist, was clattering away, and Miss Trant, our budding Portia, was having a glance at a matrimonial. I rely on her account for the reception of Mr. Khan in our clerk's room.

He announced himself as Mr. Lutaf Ali Khan and said he had an urgent appointment with my learned self. When Henry promised to ring through to my room, Mr. Khan beamed at them. He was eager and rather young.

"Thrilling! This is thrilling to have a chance of pupilage in the Chambers of Horace Rumpole, the legend of the Criminal Bar of England." Uncle Tom caught his eye. "And you, of course, sir. I will have a lot to learn from a person of your age and seniority! I expect to pick up hundreds of red-hot tips from the whole lot of you!"

"We'll do our best to help." Miss Trant didn't notice a particularly warm welcome from the rest of Chambers, so she advanced on him with a compensating smile.

"Thank you. You are on the secretarial side?"

"Miss Trant is a very rising young barrister," Uncle Tom told him.

"The great fraternity of the Bar! Truly it embraces all sorts and conditions of men—and women also," Mr. Khan said enthusiastically and then Henry rose from his desk to lead him into the pres-

ence. When he had gone, Uncle Tom spoke to Miss Trant in a tone of some bewilderment.

"I don't see very clearly. It gets dark in the morning, but was that fellow some sort of Babu?"

"Indian, I'd say," Hoskins gave his expert opinion.

"I suppose he'll pick our brains here and then go out and become Prime Minister of somewhere. Do very nicely out of it." Uncle Tom sniffed behind the *Daily Telegraph*.

"What on *earth* does Rumpole think he's up to?" Erskine-Brown wondered, and Miss Trant gave him a look of stern disapproval.

"My old Uncle Jarvis had that fellow Ghandi in his Chambers as a pupil." Uncle Tom was off on one of his reminiscences. "He wore a bowler hat in those days apparently, not a loin cloth. I mean Ghandi didn't wear a loin cloth, not my Uncle Jarvis, of course."

"What do you mean, what's Rumpole up to?" Miss Trant asked Erskine-Brown in a challenging manner.

"Taking a pupil without going through the pupilage committee in Chambers."

"You mean taking *that* pupil, don't you?"

At which moment, Miss Trant told me, she slammed out of the clerk's room and started off down the passage. Erskine-Brown set off in pursuit—he was after all, as you may remember, her fiancé.

"For all I know whatever-his-name-is Khan may be a perfectly sound fellow—but—"

"But! But?"

"I mean—"

"I know perfectly well what you mean," said Miss Trant, with an anger that did her the greatest credit.

"Don't forget *Un Ballo in Maschera*." Claude Erskine-Brown was an opera buff who intended, that night, to take his *inamorata* to Covent Garden. "It's curtain-up at seven-thirty."

"Stuff *Un Ballo in Maschera*!" said the admirable Miss Trant and slammed into her room.

All this while I was in conference on a matter which was new to me, an alleged offense under the Race Relations Act, arising out of those very political events which had, on Sunday afternoon, made me feel they were winding back the film of history so that we should find ourselves, in the fullness of time, reliving World War Two.

My client, Captain Rex Parkin, late of the Pay Corps, was a prospective Britain First parliamentary candidate—one, I profoundly

hoped, whose deposit was no way safe. He had appeared at his party's rally in Brixton and made a regrettable speech in which, so ran the police evidence, he had recommended repatriation of all migrants ("We want our tinted brothers to be thoroughly *at home*. In *their* homes, my friends, not in ours!") and he ended his speech with the gnomic utterance, "The answer, my friends, is—Blood."

Someone at the meeting broke the window of an Indian grocer's shop and the gallant Captain was arrested before he, in his turn, was attacked by the New Socialists, who had armed themselves with chairs, sticks, and other mementos from a nearby building site for the occasion.

Captain Parkin was a middle-aged humorless man who wore a neat blue suit, a Pay Corps tie, a sparse sandy moustache, and the expression of someone prepared to die for his cause. He sat bolt upright on a hard chair whilst young Simmonds, an articled clerk from Parkin's solicitors' office, wallowed in my client's armchair, looked puzzled, and lost documents. When Mr. Lutaf Ali Khan was shown into the room by Henry there was such a sharp disapproving intake of breath from Captain Parkin that I couldn't resist taking the eager young Pakistani there and then.

"Khan! My dear fellow. You come warmly recommended from the Inn. An apt pupil —Ready to start work, are you?"

"As soon as you say so, Mr. Horace Rumpole. I am mustard keen, I must say."

"That's the ticket! This is the client, Mr.—no, sorry—*Captain*. Captain Rex Parkin.

"And young Simmonds, our instructing solicitor. My new pupil—"

"Lutaf Ali Khan. At your service, Captain."

The Captain avoided Khan's eager eye. There was an awkward silence.

"Yes. Well, why not sit down here, dear boy. Learn to take notes. I never have."

Khan sat on the other side of Rumpole's desk, his pen poised. Captain Parkin cleared his throat. "I would like to stress, Mr. Rumpole. This is a *confidential* matter."

"Oh, don't mind Khan. It's the only thing to do with pupils. Throw them in at the deep end. You know what we have here, Khan? A rather nasty charge under the Race Relations Act.

"Let's see what I know about our client, the Captain. You are ex-Pay Corps." I flicked through my brief for Khan's benefit. "Served Overseas?"

"I served my country as best I could. Given my medical condition." The Captain looked dignified.

"Flat feet—" I read it in the brief, and comforted the client. "Don't worry. I was in the RAF groundstaff. We both avoided the temptations of heroism."

"Worked after demobilization selling the *World Wide Encyclopedia*. Married for twenty-five years to Mavis Parkin. Owns his own bungalow, 'Mandalay,' Durbar Lane, Bexley Heath. Employed since 1958 as a clerk in the South-East Area Gas Board." It sounded like a life full of incident and romance.

"Captain Parkin wishes it to be known that he's absolutely sincere." This was young Simmonds' contribution.

"Unfortunately, that isn't a defense in law. I've known quite a number of very genuine robbers. They sincerely wanted to be rich." I continued to read. "The answer is—Blood."

"Mr. Rumpole. On the question of sentence—" The Captain raised a delicate question.

"Sorry. You want to know what you might be in for?"

"The maximum. If you please, sir."

"Two years' imprisonment. Or a fine. Or both. Section 6 of the 1978 Act." The admirable Khan had the answer at his fingertips.

*"And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,
That one small head could carry all he knew . . ."*

"You see what a huge advantage a pupil is, Captain. Well, now you know the worst."

And then Captain Parkin said something so unexpected, so unknown in a client, that I was left staring at him in amazement.

"I want you, sir, to ask for the maximum penalty."

"Now, Captain Perkins—Parkin. Now listen to me a moment, my old darling. Regard me," I told him, "as your professional attendant, who cares for your health. Now if I were treating you for a nasty go of 'flu, Captain Perkins, I couldn't allow you to dance naked in the east wind at midnight on a damp lawn, could I?"

"I intend, in the trial, sir, to behave as Ghandi did before the District Magistrate in Ahmedobad. I intend to argue for the maximum sentence." Captain Parkin had risen to his feet and seemed to be standing to attention.

"Excuse me, Captain, but wasn't the Mahatma of foreign extraction?"

"One can learn at times, sir, from the enemy. Mr. Ghandi asked for life imprisonment. It was the best way he could serve his cause—as a martyr."

"Well, I suppose I have a cause too, of a sort," I told him. "I defend people. I don't think I could ask a judge to send a client of mine to prison. It'd be against my religion."

"Then, sir, I am wasting your time." Captain Parkin moved to the door. "I'll conduct my own case. I presume I'm entitled to do that?"

"It's a free world—for the moment."

Before I'd got the words out, the door slammed. My client had gone off on his own.

"He's a fool, Mr. Rumpole, if he won't take *your* advice." Young Simmonds looked intensely embarrassed.

"It's his affair entirely," I comforted him. "Our prison system's open to all, old darling. Regardless of creed or color."

When I told Hilda I had a pupil, she was pleased. She remembered that her "daddy," old C. H. Wystan, had had a pupil, namely me. She told me to bring my pupil home to dinner one night and promised to make him a nice roast. Remembering the nonsense she had talked about the old days of the British Raj, I agreed to do so.

A couple of weeks later, Khan and I received another visit from Captain Rex Parkin and his distraught solicitor. It seemed that the central committee for the South-Eastern Region of the Britain First party had met at my client's bungalow, "Mandalay." Prominent members—a Mr. Cliff Worseley, a local garage-owner, and a Mr. Sydney Cox, quantity surveyor and local party chairman, had persuaded the Captain that it was in the party's interests that the case should be fought. The Captain had told them I was an aging junior barrister with a Pakistani pupil, whereupon Cliff Worseley had said that was an excellent thing as it would prove to the jury that Britain First was not a racist party. During this account, Khan smiled politely and I promised to fight the good fight and forget the Captain's former ambition to be convicted.

There were those, of course, who didn't approve of my having taken on Captain Parkin's defense. When I went into Pommeroy's Wine Bar for an evening jar I met the most distinguished member of our Chambers, Guthrie Featherstone, Q.C., M.P., who looked at me from his considerable height and in his most distinguished manner. "Rumpole, I'm prosecuting you in the Race Relations case. Philida Trant's my junior."

"Sounds a formidable combination."

"You know, Rumpole," Featherstone went on, "I was talking to old Keith from the Lord Chancellor's office the other day. He was surprised at you of all people—defending a wretched Fascist beast."

"I defend murderers. Doesn't mean I approve of murder."

"No, but politically, I was thinking. The time may come, Rumpole, when you might think of subsiding gently on the Circuit Bench."

"Rumpole a Circus Judge?" It was a fate which has always seemed to me considerably worse than death.

"It's not a job the Lord Chancellor's office hands out to fellows who stand up for Fascists."

"Oh, really?" I sank a large glass of Chateau Fleet Street and began to negotiate with Jack Pommeroy for more.

"Afraid so, Rumpole. I mean, you're not getting much younger. I don't know what your pension scheme is—"

My pension, as he well knew, consisted of my growing overdraft and the dwindling lease on my flat at Froxbury Court, Gloucester Road. However, I was rapidly losing patience with Guthrie Featherstone, Q.C., M.P.

"My pension scheme is about as nonexistent as your friend old Keith's knowledge of Voltaire."

"Voltaire?" The Q.C., M.P. looked puzzled.

"M. Arouet," I explained. "Remember what he said? 'I disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it?' You might read that to the jury when you're opening the little matter of the Queen against Captain Rex Parkin—"

The evening came when I took Mr. Khan home to meet my wife Hilda and her roast. She Who Must Be Obeyed didn't actually scream or send for the police when she clapped eyes on my pupil, but she looked severely shaken, and matters were so tense round the festive board that I was constrained to tell one of my best stories as I carved the beef. I chose the beauty about two men charged with an act of buggery under Waterloo Bridge and charged by dear old Judge Darcy at the Bailey.

"These two men were caught misbehaving themselves under Waterloo Bridge and when he was passing sentence, that exquisite old Judge Hubert Darcy said, 'You two men have done an abominable act. A most disgusting and horrible act. And what makes it worse—you chose to do it under one of the most *beautiful* bridges in London.'"

I laughed loudly at this *conte*, as I always do. Khan smiled politely. Hilda was appalled.

She looked even more anxious as she pushed a laden plate of roast to Khan. "Oh dear. I didn't realize. Can you eat beef?"

"Of course he can, Hilda. What do you think? He'd be afraid it was a reincarnation of his grandmother?" I looked at Khan reassuringly. "Don't worry, dear boy. We got it at Sainsbury's."

"Roast beef of old England. Perfectly fine. Suits me down to the ground." Khan sounded enthusiastic. I tried to pour claret into his glass, but the young Pakistani put his hand over it.

"Oh, come along. If you're starting a career at the Bar, we've got to introduce you to the delights of Pommeroy's claret."

"Well, then, just a snifter." I was glad to see him lap up the claret.

I went to turn off one bar of the electric fire. "What are you doing, Hilda, turning the place into the hothouse at Kew?"

"Don't you find England very cold, Mr. Khan?" Hilda asked nervously.

"No. No, I assure you. It is much much colder in the Punjab in the winter."

"Wasn't your Aunt Fran in the Punjab, Hilda?"

"Oh, that was in the old days. The British Raj, you know."

"All gone now, eh, Khan? Much to the regret of our client, Captain Parkin." I gave them a bit of Kipling.

*"Far-call'd our navies melt away
On dune and headland sinks the fire . . .
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh, and Tyre . . ."*

"My uncle was District Railway Officer Percy Wystan. I don't know if you ever met him?" Hilda asked, a singularly stupid question.

"Rather before my time, I'm afraid, Mrs. Rumpole. All the same—we had some sensible fellows in the government then. Not these silly asses we get today."

"Do you really think so?" She Who Must Be Obeyed seemed to be thawing slightly.

"All the same, they are your own silly asses. Isn't that the point?" I put it to Khan.

"Oh, yes. But they make us blush sometimes."

At which Hilda actually smiled and I raised a beaker to young Khan's future at the Bar.

"How can I go wrong," Khan said, "with such a distinguished teacher as Mr. Horace Rumpole?"

"You think he's a distinguished teacher?" She was incredulous.

"Oh, gosh, yes, Mrs. Rumpole. Your husband's bound to end up seated on the Bench, at least at Circuit Judge level."

"Rumpole! Do you hear that?" She was delighted.

"Never. Never in a million years—"

"I always thought, if you would take a bit of prosecution work, Mr. Rumpole. That seems to be the path to the Bench nowadays," Khan said, and Hilda agreed.

"Mr. Khan, that's exactly what I'm always telling him."

"I don't fancy the idea of people locked up with their own chamber-pots. Not for years on end, anyway. I wouldn't like to cross-examine them into it. —And I don't want to sentence them to it either."

"Someone has to do it, Mr. Rumpole," Khan said, winning more of Hilda's approval.

"Someone has to clean out the sewers. Just so long as it isn't me."

"You know, Mrs. Rumpole, I don't entirely agree with my learned pupilmaster. There are two dreadful Pakistani students in my digs and I can swear they stole my transistor radio. I'd send them inside, double-quick pronto."

At which Hilda smiled at him sweetly. I could see that life at the Bar would hold no further terrors for Khan. The Lord Chief. The Court of Appeal. The House of Lords. The Uxbridge Magistrates. They'd all be child's play to him now. Like shooting fish in a water butt now that he'd dealt in so masterly a fashion with *She Who Must Be Obeyed*.

Meanwhile Mr. Khan was looking at me with serious concern. "I honestly think Mrs. Rumpole has a point though, sir. You should think in terms of a judgeship in the years to come."

Judge "Jimmie" Jamieson was a thin, ferret-faced Scotsman of about my age. He had his wig off and was offering a silver cigarette box round to me, Guthrie Featherstone, Q.C., M.P., and Miss Trant in the privacy of his room before we started on the case of *R. v. Parkin*.

"You are an O.L., aren't you, Rumpole?" the judge asked me, and I wondered if His Honor was gratuitously insulting. "You were at Linklater's, weren't you?"

Linklater's! My old school. A wind-blasted penal colony on the Norfolk coast where thirteen-year-olds fought for the radiators and tried to hide the lumpy porridge in letters from home.

"I haven't seen you at the O.L. dinners recently," the judge went on.

"No." He hadn't seen me at the Embalmers' Annual Ball, either.

"They put on a very good show for us last year at the Connaught Rooms. —This case going to last long, is it?"

"Three days, Judge. Three or four days at the most." Guthrie Featherstone had the timetable. Now I remembered the judge. A small trembling child from Scotland. He wore a chest protector and was incredibly mean about his tuck.

"I'm hoping to get a week's fishing in starting on Monday," Jamieson said. "I just wanted to get the timing from you fellows. Remember our last case, Rumpole?"

"The Paddington affray."

"Crowds of piccaninnies scrapping with knives on Paddington Station." The judge smiled as if at a happy memory.

Oh, dear! Oh, my ears and whiskers! We could hardly hope for a trial in the spirit of Voltaire. Miss Trant, I thought, looked especially disgusted.

Shortly thereafter the case was underway in one of the New Courts at the Bailey and I was cross-examining the officer in charge.

"This broken window of the grocer's shop, Inspector. You have no way of knowing if the perpetrator of that act had heard my client's oration, had you?"

"No, sir."

"It might have been done by anyone at all—some destructive schoolboy?"

"Let us hope he was not at Linklater's, Rumpole!" said the judge, and seemed to find it amusing.

"Now, you say my client said something about blood?" I carried on, killing the laugh.

"He said 'The answer is—Blood!'" The Inspector consulted his notebook. "I couldn't hear all that clearly."

"Exactly! The rival factions were yelling their heads off. So he might have said 'The answer is *in* the blood?'"

"Really, if my learned friend thinks there is any difference—" Guthrie Featherstone rose wearily.

"Let me instruct my learned friend. If he said, 'The answer is Blood,' it might well be an incitement to violence."

"I am glad my learned friend at least appreciates the point of the prosecution case—"

"But if he said, 'The answer is *in* the blood,' he was merely referring to some supposed difference in racial characteristics, and the remark was quite innocuous."

"There is a clear distinction, is there not, Mr. Featherstone?" I was half ashamed to discover that the judge was on my side.

"If Your Lordship pleases." Featherstone subsided, and I gave the jury a friendly smile as I said:

"I am glad that my learned friend has at last grasped the nature of the defense."

"Straight up, Mr. Rumpole. He's got the Union Jack flying on his bungalow."

I was in the pub opposite the Bailey to which I had inveigled my pupil Khan, who was taking a note for me in the case, for a quick shepherd's pie and a pint of draught Guinness (Khan had become quite a healthy drinker under my tuition, and a good companion both in the pub at lunchtime and in Pommeroy's after the battle of the day was done) and I had been approached by a tall, overweight individual, with a blotchy pink face, whose long tow-colored hair hung over the rabbit-fur collar of his "car coat."

It appeared that this unpromising individual was Cliff Worseley, garage-owner of Purley and committee member of the South-Eastern section of the Britain First movement. Cliff had been giving me a number of details of the character and way of life of my client, Captain Parkin, including a description of the decor of his bungalow, "Mandalay," his relationship with his wife Mavis, and his addiction to homemade curries and homing pigeons.

"Union Jack on his bungalow? I don't suppose," I asked hopefully, "he lowers it at sunset by any chance?"

"He does, Mr. Rumpole! I swear to you he does," Cliff laughed delightedly. "Is that sort of stuff any use to you?"

"I would say extremely useful."

Cliff disappeared into the crowd and I went over to the bar to find Miss Trant in sympathetic conversation with my pupil. As I arrived, she went off to join her learned leader, Guthrie Featherstone, who was on the point of returning to Court.

"That woman!" Khan said, looking after her. "Is she of immoral character or what is she?"

"Why? Whatever did she say?"

"She said that she and I had the same problems. She wanted us to be friends and allies."

"Oh, Khan—"

"I told her that my father, who is Chief of Police in the Punjab, had gone to financial sacrifices to send me to England, and I was in no position to form any alliance with her even if I wanted to. In my country we would call that an immoral woman."

Poor Miss Trant. The way of the liberal is extremely hard, as I found out when I came to address the jury at the end of the proceedings of *R. v. Parkin*.

I had worked carefully on my final speech and I joyfully incorporated all the information about my client that Cliff had given me. As a matter of fact I thought it went rather well.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury," I said, "let me introduce you to a dreamer! He doesn't dream of money, or women—he dreams of the ancient days of the British Raj. Captain Rex Parkin. It's true. He's an ex-Captain of the Pay Corps. True that he's never been further east, as far as I know, than a day trip to Boulogne."

One jury woman smiled, gradually others started to smile.

"The closest he's got to India is the weekly night out he has with his Memsahib, Mrs. Mavis Parkin, in the Star of India Curry House in Bexley Heath."

Someone in the jury started to laugh. I caught a glimpse of Captain Parkin's furious face in the dock and bashed on regardless.

"But Captain Rex Parkin, dreaming away amongst his pigeons and his old bound copies of the *Boys' Own Paper*, fancies himself an officer of the British Raj. The Union Jack flies daily over his bungalow 'Mandalay,' number 12 B Durbar Lane, and is solemnly lowered every evening at sunset. Hardly appropriate dreams are they, for the world of today? When you can hardly call out the Bengal Lancers to subdue a spot of trouble on the Ealing frontier."

Now I was getting continuous snuffles of laughter from the jury, and behind me the prisoner at the bar was becoming increasingly restless.

"Or ride out by elephant to accept the surrender of the Maharajah of Muswell Hill?"

Captain Parkin struggled to his feet, but the Dock Officer put a

hand on his arm and he subsided. He sat more or less quiet for my peroration.

"Is this a free country, members of the jury? Is this a country where Captain Parkin and other eccentrics can flourish in all their dottiness? I may not agree with what Captain Parkin said—it's very easy to believe in free speech for those we agree with—but someone, a wise French man, once gave us the answer. 'I disagree with everything you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.'"

"I wish to say—" My client was standing rigidly to attention, apparently about to make another speech repudiating the charge of dottiness made against him by his learned Counsel.

"Sit down, Rex!" The words were only whispered but they came quite clearly from Cliff in the back of the Court.

"I wish to say—I obey orders," said Captain Parkin, and sat down and kept his mouth shut from then on.

Judge "Jimmie" Jamieson's summing-up came in for a good deal of criticism in the press and on telly, so I'll just give you the final, ill-considered, passage:

"What the defendant is alleged to have said, members of the jury, is that most of us are happier in our own homes. You may have heard the old saying, 'My heart's in the Highlands, my heart isn't here.' I myself am a native of another country, members of the jury. I was born in Kirkcudbrightshire. Often amid the bustle of London's traffic I long for the peace of the little village I came from and where, I hope, in my retirement, to return. I don't suppose I'd be in the least upset if anyone said that about me. Nor would I take offense if he said I have different blood in my veins. The blood of Clan Jamieson of the Glen! I don't think I can help you any further, ladies and gentlemen. You will go out and consider your verdict."

As I have written elsewhere, I regard the time when the jury is out as the worst part of a barrister's life. Your mouth is dry, your hands sweat, and, whatever the case, all your life's work seems to be on trial and waiting for a verdict. I went up to the Bar Mess on the top floor of the Old Bailey, and barristers in similar circumstances were playing draughts, or drinking coffee, or reading the *Sun*. I lit a small cigar and Miss Trant came up to me, clearly enraged.

"What did you think of that jury?"

"I thought they seemed moderately sympathetic." In fact, they

seemed to be a middle-aged lot of solid citizens from the New Cross area. I saw them nod several times at the judge's summing-up.

"Oh, did you really? Charmed, do you think they were, by your call to free speech?"

"I think they saw the point," I told her. "In fairness."

"And 'Jimmie' Jamieson wanted to pay his glowing tribute to Voltaire, too. For the first time in his life?"

"Miss Trant, you're becoming eloquent!" I looked at her with approval. No doubt she had learned her art from me, but she might turn out to be a credit to our Chambers.

"I'll tell you about that jury," she went on remorselessly. "I was watching their faces. They just wanted the faintest excuse to let the Fascist beast off. That's all they want."

"Don't be ridiculous, Miss Trant. They'll decide the whole thing perfectly fairly. If they acquit it'll be because they believe in free speech."

"Or because they're a bunch of Paki-bashers?"

I wished she wouldn't say such things. I was beginning to find them curiously unsettling. I was further unsettled when the jury came back half an hour later with a unanimous verdict of Not Guilty. I went over to congratulate my client, who was being "sprung" from the dock. He looked at me with his strangely colorless eyes, standing like a ramrod, in his parody of a military bearing, and said something to me which I shall not quickly forget.

"May God forgive you, Mr. Rumpole," he said. "I certainly shan't."

It was some months later that I learned the end of the Captain Rex Parkin story. A plump, grey-haired lady came to see me with young Simmonds. It seemed she wanted to sue certain members of the South-Eastern Committee of the Britain First party for damages for the way they had treated her husband. She asked me if she had a case and described a meeting of the committee which took place in the living room of their bungalow, "Mandalay," soon after I had secured her husband's acquittal. Cliff Worseley was there, and Sydney Cox as chairman. I pictured the scene, the sullen faces seated round among the souvenirs of the Empire, the silent Captain Parkin sitting to attention on an upright chair, Mavis Parkin pouring coffee for the group and staying to listen to the debate. I can even imagine the offensive pomposity with which Cliff put the motion.

"In a pitiful attempt to save his own skin, Rex Parkin showed the yellow streak, gentlemen. He allowed his barrister, in a so-called

Court of Law, to pour scorn on the party. To make us a laughing stock! At the Old Bailey and in the National Press! Therefore I beg to move, Sydney, as deputy-chairman, and gentlemen, that Rex Parkin, having proved himself unworthy of the high office we have entrusted to him, be removed as a prospective candidate of the Britain First party.

"Have you anything to say, Rex?" the chairman asked him.

"No. No. Nothing to say."

The motion, it seemed, was carried and Cliff Worseley was chosen as the new candidate. He stood and made a short opening address.

"Gentlemen, the need of the party is for more positive, dynamic leadership. The days of the British Raj are over. The gorgeous 'Empah' on which the sun never set is gone. We have work to do, gentlemen, more suited to the desperate needs of this particular moment in time. And in that work we must not be afraid of dirtying our hands in the interests of the party."

Mavis watched as her husband got up, stood to attention, and left the room. It seemed that he kept his pigeons in an old shed at the bottom of the garden. What his wife didn't know was that he also kept there an old army revolver and a certain amount of ammunition. She was washing up the coffee cups when she heard a shot, and saw the pigeons fly up in a white cloud. Captain Parkin, having been responsible, as he thought, for my ridiculing his party, had shot himself.

"They always wanted to get rid of him, you see. So they used that as an excuse. And it was Rex's whole life, his whole life entirely."

I had to advise her that, so far as I could see, she had no legal remedy.

We were having one of our regular Chambers meetings, drinking tea out of Guthrie Featherstone's bone-china tea set in Guthrie Featherstone's big room, and we were discussing the question of new tenants.

"The Departure of George Frobisher to the Circuit Court Bench has left something of a gap in Chambers. Clearly we need a new tenant," said the Q.C., M.P. "Erskine-Brown will remind us of the candidates. There seem to be two main contenders."

"Well, we have had an application from Owen Glendour-Jones. He wants to move up to London. He has a very sound practice in Wales. Apparently he'll bring us a large number of Welsh solicitors."

"That's what I'm afraid of," I grumbled.

"Really, Rumpole!" I was rebuked.

"I'm sorry. I forgot about the Race Relations Act."

"I have seen Glendour-Jones. He seems to me to be an admirable candidate," Featherstone told us.

"I do miss George. I can't see myself revelling in Pommeroy's Wine Bar with Glendour whatever-you-call-him."

"The other candidate is Rumpole's pupil, Lutaf Ali Khan—"

"Now Khan does represent something of a special case," Featherstone started innocently, but the eloquent Miss Trant was on her feet at once.

"Oh, yes! I was a special case, wasn't I?"

"Now, Philly—" Erskine-Brown tried vainly to calm her down.

"No. No, I'm going to say this. I was a special case when I joined Chambers. No one wanted a woman. I had this extraordinary difficulty getting hold of the key of the loo. And Albert had to go through the embarrassment of explaining that the barrister he was sending out to the Hendon Court might turn out to be a woman. Now he'll have to explain that he's a—a—what do you want me to say—gentleman from Pakistan? It doesn't matter how good we are. We start out with a built-in handicap. That's what you mean by a special case, isn't it?"

"As a matter of fact, what I meant was," Featherstone explained patiently, "we're under a good deal of pressure from the Bar Council. I also happen to know the views of the Lord Chancellor's office. Keith's tremendously keen of places being found in Chambers for—overseas applicants."

"I wouldn't, speaking for myself, be influenced by the wishes of the Bar Council, or even of the Chancellor's department." Claude Erskine-Brown adopted his most judicial manner and Miss Trant barked at him.

"I'm sure you wouldn't."

"I have given a certain amount of paperwork to Khan," Erskine-Brown went on, "and I happened to be in Bow Street, waiting, when I heard him do a prosecution, standing in for Hoskins."

"You were waiting in Bow Street?" I was surprised.

"I had a licensing application," Erskine-Brown said with dignity.

"Don't worry, old sweetheart. No one's accusing you of having been nabbed for soliciting."

"In my opinion, Lutaf Khan would make a useful and hard-working member of Chambers." Ignoring me, Erskine-Brown concluded his judgment and Miss Trant looked at him, surprised and grateful.

"He also has genuine if not particularly formed musical tastes. He can feel his way round Donizetti but I hope to help him towards Wagner. I've promised him an evening at Covent Garden, Philly."

"He'd probably rather have another afternoon at Bow Street," I told him.

"Thank you, Erskine-Brown," Featherstone said. "Thanks for your contribution. Well now, suppose we take a vote. All those in favor of the candidacy of Owen Glendour-Jones?"

"Is that the darkie?" Uncle Tom whispered deafeningly.

In the end we voted to invite my pupil to occupy a permanent seat in Chambers, and I went off to tell the news which I had no doubt would overjoy him.

When I got to my room, I found Khan working hard and a letter on my desk from the Lord Chancellor's department. I opened it with somewhat mystified fingers to discover that old Keith Hopner, Guthrie's friend, wanted to see me as soon as possible at the House of Lords. Was Rumpole tipped for High Office? I put the thought aside and turned to Khan.

"We just had a discussion of your candidacy up at the Chambers meeting and I'm delighted to tell you you're in."

"No—" As I thought, the man was overwhelmed.

"Difficult to believe? Not at all. There was just a short discussion—and of course you can go on sharing my room. Keep your desk over there and—"

"This is terribly embarrassing."

"Not at all. Be glad to have you. Look, if you'd like to start making a note of the deps in this nice little murder—" I offered him a pile of papers that had just come in.

"The truth is—oh, gosh. I don't want to offend Mr. Featherstone and I *have* enjoyed it here. But no. No, I don't want to stay in these Chambers."

"You don't *what*?" I couldn't believe my ears.

"I am more interested in prosecuting, Mr. Rumpole. As you know, I am most keen that some of those terrible fellows get their come-uppance."

"Yes, but Khan—you can get prosecution briefs here. I don't do them, but—"

"Careless driving, Mr. Rumpole. Small potatoes. I am after the bigger fish."

By now I must admit I was feeling ever so slightly miffed.

"Oh, yes. And where exactly are you going to put down your nets?"

"I am offered a place in a Treasury Counsel's Chambers. We have a direct line there, to the Director of Public Prosecutions. With great respect, it doesn't seem to me that you fellows have too much contact with the Powers That Be."

I looked at Khan amazed.

"I am sorry, Mr. Rumpole. I have admired your way of doing cases. It's your technique to laugh at them, isn't it? I suppose that's what Captain Rex Parkin found a bit too much to bear."

"I wouldn't have thought you'd feel Captain Parkin was a great loss to society!"

"It is what is coming after him. That's what makes me more nervous."

I let that one go, and returned to the business of his future, rather than this country's.

"It's your decision, Khan," I told him. "You must do exactly what you think best. But you're quite wrong if you think this Chambers has no connection with the Powers That Be." I picked up the letter from my desk. "I have a letter here. An invitation to the Lord Chancellor's office for a little chat."

Walking down the Embankment towards the House of Lords, on a sunny day with the seagulls shrieking around Boadicea's statue, I asked myself who on earth wanted to be a Circus Judge? Poor old George Frobisher did. I pitied him. I really pitied him. Working every day. Ten till four. Paying as you earn. Might as well be a bank manager. Besides which, it was a lonely job, being a judge. No friends. No real mates. No companionable jars at the end of the day in Pommeroy's Wine Bar. I also wondered who in hell wanted to judge people. I mean what would I say to them? "Mr. Bloggs, you will go to prison for two years, and there, but for the Grace of God, Horace Rumpole goes with you?"

But when I was being led down the red-carpeted corridors of that dream palace, the House of Lords, past the portraits of old Dukes and Marquesses, my thoughts, I must confess, took a somewhat different turn. On the other hand, well, on the other hand, it's an easy life. I mean, you sit there, without any strain or worry. I mean, you don't give a damn who *wins*. And of course there's a bit of pension attached. Once you get your bottom on the Bench you're in for a pension. Hilda and I would be glad of a pension, I thought.

And I might even be able to do a bit of good as a judge. Show

appropriate mercy. "Madam, you are more sinned against than sinning. The sentence will be half an hour's imprisonment which you have already served. You are free to go." Look of cold fury on the officer in charge of the case. Being a judge might even provide Rumpole with a certain amount of harmless fun.

At which point I was shown into the presence of Sir Keith Hopner, O.B.E., a large pink vision in a black jacket and pin-striped trousers, who sat in a leather chair and looked at me smiling.

"I have been thinking it over most carefully, Keith," I told him, "and I'm not totally opposed to the suggestion."

"Good. That's very good. Judge Jamieson said you might be interested—"

"He said that?" I was surprised he had been discussing my elevation with the primitive Scot.

"Yes. Pity about 'Jimmie.' Pity he put his foot in it."

"Well, one does have to be rather careful," I sounded circumspect, "what one says on the Bench."

"I'm so glad you agree."

"I've thought a lot about it," I told him. "But the fact is, I get rather tired these days. Not quite so young as I was, of course. Slogging from the Sessions to the Bailey and out to Chelmsford. Plays hell with the back."

"I hope you'll have *time* for this job," Sir Keith was concerned.

"Well, of course. Ten till four. No homework! Wonderful!"

"Well, it shouldn't take as long as *that*."

"What won't?" I was puzzled.

"The little job I have in mind. Let me explain—"

"Well. Of course I can get used to it."

"I'm sure you can. After all, you were at Linklater's, weren't you?"

I couldn't see what my old school had to do with it. "Yes. But is that a qualification?"

"Didn't Jamieson make it clear?" Sir Keith explained carefully, "We wanted you to take on as Secretary of the 'Old Linklater's' at the Bar Society. The O.L.B.S. We dine once a year, you know. In the Connaught Rooms. Come on, Rumpole! We old members of school have got to stick together!"

My look of amazement turned suddenly to laughter. In fact, I was still laughing as I walked back to the Temple, along the Embankment. It sounded as if the seagulls were laughing with me.

a **NEW Sam Train** story by

ERNEST SAVAGE

"Millie, why bother?" Sam said. He hadn't touched the money. "Why trouble what may be your last few months with this thing? If the cops don't think Oliver killed Andrew, it's almost certain that he didn't..."

ONE MAN'S OPINION

by **ERNEST SAVAGE**

Her name was Millie—something. I'd seen her here in Nandino's off and on over the past ten years. We had nodded at one another, occasionally exchanged greetings. Now she stood at my table, poised, but diffident. She had a cigarette in one hand, a drink in the other. She said, "Mr. Train—" then familiarized it to "Sam—" and sat down.

I said, "Yes, Millie."

"I'd like you to investigate something for me," she said. "I'd like to hire you."

It was after ten. I was tired and bleary-eyed, ready to go home. She was a give-no-quarter smoker. The stuff beclouded her, dribbled from her nose. Through it, and with it, I smelled an elegant and expensive scent. She was an elegant woman, now well aged. She was reputedly rich and I—the sly detective—had long since noted the cut and class of her clothes. None of her garments ever looked new—a sure sign.

"Investigate what, Millie?"

"I think," she said slowly, girding for it, "my nephew Oliver killed my nephew Andrew." She sighed, a painful tension eased.

I was impressed and showed it—not just another stolen-dog case. I said, "What makes you think so?"

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"It seems logical than he did."

Sally, the waitress, placed a fresh scotch in front of my hand and a gin in front of hers. Millie drank nothing but gin on the rocks. Millie frequently bought drinks for other people. I raised mine in silent salute and she said unexpectedly, almost coquettishly, "Sam, guess how old I am."

"I would rather," I growled, "face a madman with a gun in his hand."

Something brightened in her eyes, became her first smile. "That's discreet. But the matter's apropos. I'm seventy-three and have only a short time left, maybe two months. I've been given the word. *Not*," she added militantly, "the cigarettes—some rascally thing I can't even pronounce." She drew a barrel of smoke.

I was cautious. "Do I commiserate, Millie—or congratulate?"

She took it as I'd thought she would. She was a trooper, this handsome old woman I'd been watching at a distance for years. "A little of each," she said, "is not unwelcome. But the point is, Sam, both boys knew it a month ago. A week later Andrew was dead. They were my heirs. Now only Oliver is."

"Dead how? From what?"

"Trauma." She shrugged, a half shudder. "Smashed dead against some rocks after a hundred-foot fall from a cliff. In Marin. A fine place to die," she added thoughtfully.

I stared at her. She had meant it. I said, "Pushed, you presume, by his cousin—or brother?—Oliver."

"Cousin," she said. She pressed forward in her chair. "Sam—please determine the truth for me. Oliver had the motive and he has about him these days an unaccustomed air, a victor's set to his shoulders. And yet—"

"Millie," I said gruffly, "what do the cops say? The coroner?"

"Death by misadventure." She shrugged again, a charming lop-sided gesture. "Isn't that a lovely phrase?" Behind her back, twenty feet away, Nandino's bartender Marty, black as the inside of a closed mouth, was watching us. He nodded, approving this tête-à-tête, probably knowing the gist of it. Probably he had suggested it. I grinned at him. Nandino's is a family joint. Most of its patrons feel at home in it. I do. I feel safe here. The hat I don't wear hangs here. It's dark and comfortable and seasoned with the velvety musk of old San Francisco, an honest sea town before it became what it's become.

She took money from her purse, a great wad of it. She said she'd been told my fee and peeled off enough for three days. I sighed at

it, hooked. She told me where Oliver worked—at a travel agency—and where he lived, in an apartment three blocks from where he worked. His last name was Weston, as was Andrew's, as was hers. She'd never married and her two brothers had died years ago. When she finished this recitation she sagged with fatigue and I said, "Millie, why bother?" I hadn't touched the money. "Why trouble what may be your last few months with this thing? If the cops don't think Oliver killed him, it's almost certain that he didn't."

"Sam, I must be absolutely certain, not almost."

"Otherwise—what? You change your will?"

"Yes." She straightened her back, an effort that made her wince. "Oliver's the fifth generation of Westons in San Francisco. We're an old and honorable family. If he killed his cousin I don't plan to reward him for it."

"Okay," I said, chastened. "But probably the best I can come up with is an opinion. One man's, Millie, not a jury's."

"I'll accept that." She was fumbling in her purse again and I was about to say I didn't need more money for now, but it wasn't money she brought forth. "These are Andrew's autopsy and police reports," she said, handing me the familiar forms.

I read the autopsy report first, squinting in the gloom.

Andrew died, as she had said, from insufferable trauma. Few bones in his body were not broken. But there were other things. His blood-alcohol content was point one-seven. Point four-o will kill you, so he was solidly drunk. He had a half pound of poorly masticated fried chicken in his stomach on which the digestive juices had not had time to work. He had a badly deteriorated liver, a bleeding peptic ulcer, and a lot of other lifestyle damage.

I looked up and said, "Take your money back, Millie. He got drunk and fell off the cliff all by himself."

"Read the police report," she told me.

I did, with tiring eyes. Andrew Bostwick Weston, it told me, age 50, height 5' 9", weight 220, male caucasian, unmarried, had died at approx. 1:45 P.M. on Saturday, July 27. The time is reasonably exact because the beach strollers who discovered and reported the body to the Marin County sheriff had heard his scream as he fell off the cliff only moments before.

It had been established that at approx. 10:30 that morning Mr. Weston drove his 1977 Cadillac into the E. Cassidy North Beach Cadillac Agency, left it there, and asked to test-drive a current model. He was unaccompanied by a salesman because he was a long-

time customer. He said he'd have it back by noon, but when at five-thirty it hadn't been returned Mr. Cassidy reported it to the S.F. police as missing, possibly stolen. Due to normal bureaucratic data-lag the missing car was not connected to the dead man, whose body had been found and identified some hours before.

The car was found the following day at 2:37 P.M. parked in the visitors' parking area at the S.F. end of the Golden Gate Bridge. Police theorized that a transient, a vagrant, a kid, or any one of the oddball population known to frequent the Marin County hinterland had found the car parked on a dirt road a hundred yards or so from where Mr. Weston fell to his death, driven it back down and across the bridge, chickened out at that point, parked it there, and taken a bus into town. The car was undamaged and the keys were in the ignition. It had been driven fifty-three miles since leaving the agency, a figure consistent with the police theory. Conclusion: death by misadventure, or possibly suicide.

"And you think," I said to Millie, "or fear, that Oliver was the one who drove the car away from the scene."

"Yes."

"It could have been anyone, Millie, just as the report says."

"Good. Just prove it to me, Sam."

"Is that it? You want me to prove that he didn't?"

"I want you to find the truth," she declared firmly. "I have a single bias—my name, my blood. God knows there's little reason for it any more, given Oliver and Andrew, but it's all I have left."

"I see. And you'd rather give the money to a cat farm than to Oliver if he did his cousin in."

"I'd rather burn it!"

"How much money is involved—roughly?"

"Well over a half million. It would have been divided equally, but now—"

"All will go to Oliver. Unless—"

"Yes. Find out for me, Sam, *please*. I can no longer stand this doubt."

The travel agency where Oliver works is on Columbus Avenue. His apartment is a few blocks away, just off Green Street. He's forty-five and a slender five-ten. He has wispy sand-colored hair and the same kind of moustache. His aunt supplied this data before I left her in Nandino's last night. When I asked her to sum him up in a word, she used two: cautious, yet volatile. Then she added a third:

tricky. She said he'd probably be wearing a gray glen-plaid suit, and he was.

When he left work at 5:30 on the dot I followed him north on Columbus and then right on Grant. We were on foot and moving at a brisk pace. I'm six-three, unless I slump, and burly. Without meaning to, I look like the cop I was for nineteen years. Which is often useful. At the corner of Vallejo I touched him on the shoulder and he quivered as though shocked.

"Relax," I said, grinning down at him. "Unless you can't—unless it's become too much for you in the three weeks since it happened."

"Who are you?" he asked breathlessly. People flowed around us. Street noise was high.

"I'm not a cop," I said, "but I'm as close to one as a sock is to a foot. We've got a whole bunch of new information, Mr. Weston. Maybe you don't know about fingerprints—their half life, so to speak. Most fade away pretty quickly, but it depends on what they're on. Glass, for instance, holds them fairly well, but the cops never found Andrew's bottle of booze. What was it? Scotch? Bourbon?"

"No. I—"

"You put a fingerprint on a piece of greasy cardboard, Oliver, and it'll last for months. They found a dozen of yours on that fried-chicken bucket, all clear as—"

"How could they? I threw—"

"Yeah, I know, you threw the bucket away. But you forgot the lid. And what I think now," I said, as his eyes squeezed shut and he teetered on his feet, "is that you need a drink."

We had it at his place, a kitchen tumbler each of jug Burgundy. I took a sip of mine and put it down, but he drained his and refilled the glass. Then he washed his hands. From the look of his apartment, small but pristinely tidy, he may have been a compulsive hand-washer. Or maybe it was a recently acquired aberration.

His living room was furnished with good stuff. Most of the wall space was taken up with framed antique travel posters, one or two of which it was reasonable to covet. On a small mantel over the nonfunctional fireplace was a picture of a woman, about thirty-five and pretty in a shy lantern-jawed way. His bedroom was a windowless alcove off the living room, drapes half drawn across the opening. His bed was neatly made.

He came in from the small bathroom and sat down on a couch, facing me in a chair. The interlude and the wine had calmed him

somewhat. His hand as he lit a cigarette was steady. His eyes had only a little trouble meeting mine. I was less sure now that my bluff was working, but I went ahead with it anyway.

"Cousin Andrew," I said, "picked you up at around eleven o'clock that Saturday morning in a brand-new borrowed Cadillac. We're not sure whether he had the bucket of chicken with him at the time or if he picked it up later, but that's not important. He drove you over to the Marin picnic site.

"He ate a lot of the chicken and drank a lot of the booze. You were nervous, probably not hungry. At the propitious moment you shoved him over the cliff to his death. You cleaned up around the place, forgetting the bucket lid, then you drove the Caddy to the south end of the bridge and took a bus the rest of the way home. Since then, life's been a hell of anxiety for you. You're a little more relaxed now than you were twenty minutes ago because it's good to get this sort of thing off your chest—to share it."

He sipped wine and drew smoke. "You can't prove any of this."

"I don't have to, the cops already have."

"Who are you if you're not a cop?"

"My name is Sam Train. I was hired by your Aunt Mildred to find out whether or not you killed your cousin. She's touchy about murder for gain, an old-fashioned woman."

He closed his eyes for a moment. "Then this has nothing to do with the police. You were bluffing. That chicken-bucket lid—"

"It doesn't matter, Oliver. I know you killed him, you know you killed him, and soon Aunt Millie will know you killed him."

"No." He lurched to his feet and wine spilled from his glass to the clean oyster-white rug on the floor. He stared down at the stain, appalled, then up at me. "I didn't kill him!" he blurted and dashed into the kitchen for something to clean up the spill.

I watched him on his hands and knees, wiping away in a frenzy, spraying some magic potion on the stain. It looked like blood. "Out, out damned spot," I said quietly. "Huh, Oliver?"

He sank back on his haunches. "I didn't kill him," he said. "He killed himself."

"Sure he did."

"He was drunk. He stood on a rock at the edge of the cliff laughing at me, a bottle in his hand. He—he—"

"What?"

"He raised the bottle to his lips and drained it, facing me, tilting

his head to get the last drop, and then he arced backward and fell." He shook his head, his eyes half closed. "I could hear his scream all the way down."

Not bad, I thought. Almost convincing. But he'd had time to work it out. I said, "But why, Oliver? Why would he want to kill himself? He was just about to inherit a fortune."

His eyes dropped back to the stain on the rug. "He was ill," he said, "very ill. He was in debt—he always lived way past his means. He was in trouble with the law—some fraudulent investment scheme, I don't know. He was a highbinder, a downright crook. But above all, Mr. Train, he hated me."

"Oh? Why?"

"I'm not sure, I've never been sure. He despised my conservative ways, my work, my—limited ambitions. He despised Margaret."

"Who's Margaret?"

His head tilted toward the picture on the mantel behind him. "Margaret Rigdon. She's my fiancée. We're to be married when Aunt Mildred dies. Margaret takes care of her invalid mother. She doesn't work. We can't afford to marry on what I make."

There was more. He painted the picture of an unsung but virtuous man. The world is full of them, fighting small fights on narrow fields of battle. There are no communiques from their wars—their deaths noted finally, but not their lives.

"So Oliver despised you," I said, "maybe even hated you. Why would that cause him to kill himself?"

He got up from the floor and went back to the couch. He ran fingers through his wispy hair, patting it back in place. He had fussy little ways. But he was probably good at the minutiae of his work, the thousand flight schedules, the close connections and bookings it entailed.

"Why?" I prompted.

He had recomposed himself, straightened his spine. "It's a long story," he said.

"I've got the time."

"It goes back to Andrew's father, and mine, and to Grandfather Weston," he said. "He died the year I was born—in 1937. He left each of his three children—my father, Andrew's, and Aunt Mildred—ten thousand dollars, a considerable sum in that depression year."

"And?"

"Andrew's father and mine mismanaged their inheritances."

Oliver furrowed his brow. "They made small, cautious, bad investments. Costive is the word, Mr. Train. They were costives—Aunt Millie wasn't. Grandfather Weston made and lost several fortunes. He had daring and so did Aunt Millie. He was on old-style San Franciscan and so was she."

This brief eulogy had brought color to Weston's cheeks. But it sounded, like so much of what he said, rehearsed.

"Oliver," I asked, "how come your aunt never married?"

He shrugged. "She adored her father, she revered the Weston name and blood. She never found a man to suit her, who measured up."

I pondered other possibilities, but dismissed them. She had beguiled me last night. A strong and elegant woman, now dying. I could scarcely relate this man to her. "Tell me again," I said, "how Andrew died."

"He fell backward over the cliff. He was drunk."

"Could it have been an accident? Unintended?"

"No."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because he said it was what he was going to do."

"On account of his illness?"

"No. —Well, yes, in part. But mostly because I was there and would be blamed for his murder. He set me up."

"So you wouldn't inherit?"

"Yes. He knew Aunt Millie would cut me off."

"As surely she will, Oliver."

"But I didn't do it, Mr. Train. I was ten feet away, pleading with him not to jump. I never touched him, believe me."

"I'm not convinced. The flip side of the disc is that you hated each other and you couldn't stand half that money going to him. I think you set the picnic deal up. I think you lured him out there deliberately to kill him."

"No! I'd never even been there before!" He stood up, angry. His wine glass was empty again. He stared at the stain on the carpet. "The police didn't question me, not once. They hadn't any reason to."

"Sometimes they miss the obvious, Oliver. But it's not a police matter any more. It's strictly up to me. You understand that?"

"Do you know why it's up to you and not up to them?" he asked.

"Do you know why she went to you and not the police?"

"Tell me."

"Because of pride in the Weston name. Because of its heritage, its unblemished record in this town. Death by misadventure is one thing, but the public inference that—that—"

"That one Weston killed another?"

"Yes. She couldn't accept even a groundless inference, without substance or proof. Nor can I, Mr. Train. That at least I've inherited."

"So?"

"So what's your price?" He glared at me righteously. "How much is my aunt paying you? I'll double it, triple it, if you can set her mind at rest. How much?"

"Gee," I said, "I don't know, the thought never crossed my mind. But is this the Weston way—to *buy* favorable decisions?"

"How much? I'll hand you a thousand dollars, spot cash."

"Which you think is the price of *my* price, a lousy grand. No way, Weston. How about Andrew's share—all of it?"

"That's ridiculous! That's—" He was stuttering.

"You get half, I get half. Otherwise neither of us gets a cent."

He would have killed me if he could have. It was in his eyes, as it's in the eyes of a cat in front of a canary cage. But it faded—he *made* it fade. It was a show of inner discipline, of toughness, of a cat's patience. If he hadn't killed Andrew, moral restraint hadn't held him back.

"I see," he said, his hauteur regained, "that you're not serious."

"I'm serious, Weston, just not bribable."

"All right, Mr. Train, you refuse money—a bribe in your terms. But that tells us more about you than it does about me. I'm looking for the least damaging way out of this—contretemps. Your unequivocal endorsement of me as Aunt Mildred's heir—bought and paid for, to be sure—would have done it." He paused for drama's sake. "But I have other means to protect my interests—more distasteful, they may be, but equally effective."

"Like what?"

"Oh, no. You've maneuvered yourself out of this thing now. Tell her whatever your conscience dictates, but leave me alone, stay out of my affairs from now on. Is that clear?"

"Well, concise anyway. But still," I added, pointing, "the stain is on the rug."

"I'll take care of that," he snapped. "I'll take care of everything!"

It was six forty-five, cocktail hour dying, and I was fifteen minutes on foot from Nandino's. Leaving Weston's, I was in North Beach,

soon to be known as North Canton, or North Peking. One picks one's way these days through diminutive Chinese in what used to be Paisano country. But it's all right. Bird's nest soup displacing minestrone—who's to say which is the better?

Millie wasn't there when I arrived, but nearly everybody else was, and I had to take a table by the kitchen door, which is like eating on the Freeway. I ordered a bowl of minestrone before the Osso Bucco, and before that two Boodles martinis on the rocks, the second of which was brought over by Marty, who thirty years ago played tackle for the Detroit Lions. Standing by my table before sitting down he had the general appearance of a three-story building on a moonless night.

"Millie's not here," I said.

"She's not coming."

"I was supposed to meet her here, Marty."

"I know. She phoned a while ago. She said she didn't think she could make the stairs tonight."

"Huh? What stairs?"

"At her place. You don't know where she lives?"

"No, come to think of it."

"On Telegraph Hill. In one of those old cliff-dwellings with eighty steps from the street to the front door."

"What's the matter with her, Marty?"

"I don't know, any more than I know what you're doing for her. You *are* doing something for her, aren't you, Sam?"

"Well, you sicked her on me."

"She said she had this problem and I told her you were pretty good with problems, that's all. So how's it going?"

"Slow. Confusing."

"Well, don't dawdle. She claims she's got a few months left, but my guess is it's more like weeks."

"Marty, is she a drunk?"

"No more than you are. She just likes the joint, the way you do."

He got up and went back to work and Sally set a bowl of dirty brown minestrone just beneath my nose. Its aroma gestated on one of Giuseppe's back burners for days, if not for weeks, rich enough to water the eyes. Someday I'll try a bowl of bird's nest soup, but not today.

Did Oliver do the deed or didn't he? Why would Andrew kill himself shortly before becoming rich? Why would he go to the trouble to show off a new car if it was merely to drive himself to his death?

But Oliver said he was ill and that was confirmed by the autopsy report. *How* ill, though? And in how much trouble with the law—if any?

Tomorrow I'd have to check it all out and make a judgment as to Andrew's mood on the day of his death. I was a one-man jury deciding the fate of a half million bucks and the destiny of a man's life. I didn't like it. The minestrone seemed suddenly too rich and I shoved it aside, an unheard-of heresy.

I studied the people in the familiar room, each one easing out of the burdensome day and into the dangerous night. A vibrant lively crowd, cogs and wheels in the machine of the town. I couldn't imagine Oliver here. It was hard to place him anywhere.

Sally removed the soup and set down the Osso Bucco, one of my ten or twelve favorite dishes, all of which run to meat, brown and glazed with gravy. Cop food. But then, cops don't live as long as other people. Look it up—many don't want to. But not me, I want to. I picked at the salad and summoned up Oliver's last words, spoken an hour ago. "I'll take care of that," he'd said. "I'll take care of everything."

He'd taken care of Andrew—I was convinced of that. Now what would he take care of?

It took a minute, but when it sunk in I got up and went to the phone booth, looked up Mildred Weston's number, and dialed it. One ringy-dingy, then twelve more, but no answer, and me in a self-castigating and angry sweat. The only thing Oliver needed to take care of was his aunt.

There weren't eighty steps, but there were a good fifty, with a right-angled landing halfway up. They were made of redwood two-by-sixes and had been there as long as the house, maybe a hundred years.

There was still daylight in the sky at eight-thirty, but her house was on the east side of the hill and her picture-window was lit. There was a broad front deck that extended to the left of the door. In the old days it would have commanded a stunning view of the bay, but high-rises now cut the scene into jagged slots.

From the deck I looked through the window and saw her. She was seated in a cushioned chair, her back to me, her feet resting on an ottoman. A TV set was playing in the corner of the room facing me, one car chasing another—our new national sport. She appeared to be asleep, head cocked to the left, but I've seen dead people look that

way. I was still in a sweat, still angry, and was about to go to the door when her left hand rose from the arm of the chair and reached for a pack of cigarettes on the table. I tiptoed away.

He didn't come until after ten, and as he plodded up the first set of steps I wondered why the delay. Unless he'd deliberately waited for the full dark of the night before making his final move, before pushing her down these worn stairs to her death. It was the perfect place to kill her, and he had a compelling motive to do it tonight. She wouldn't change her will until I talked to her—and if I'd already talked to her, as he might logically presume, she wouldn't change it until tomorrow.

He paused at the first landing to catch his breath. He was wearing a topcoat—summer nights in San Francisco can be chilly. He might have seen me from where he was, but he didn't look. He came on another fifteen steps, head down, and nearly fell into my lap. He muttered the standard curse and caught the rail to keep from falling back.

"What you should have done," I said coldly, "is come over directly after I left you this evening. Now I'm here until I can get your aunt to her lawyer in the morning. If necessary, we'll sleep together." I stood up, looming over his still-crouching form.

"Train!" he gasped. "You startled me." He took a deep breath to recover. "But I don't know what you're talking about. Actually, I'm delighted to see you. In fact, I tried to call you before I came but couldn't find a number for you in the book. I presume your phone's unlisted."

"It is. Explain why you're delighted to see me."

"Because of this," he said, and withdrew an envelope from an inner pocket.

"What is it?"

"It's a very intimate and private document, strictly for the family. For that reason I resisted showing it to you earlier. Besides, you'd angered and upset me. And that wine— But thinking about it, I changed my mind. That's when I tried to phone you—because I'd rather you saw it than Aunt Mildred."

"So what is it?"

"It's a letter written by my Aunt Ethel, Andrew's mother, a week before she died last month."

I stared at him, a whey-faced silhouette spottily limned against the sporadic lights of a high-rise apartment building to the north.

Peripherally, I hated the high-rise, all high-rises; centrally, I disliked him intensely—distrusted him. "Tricky" had been his aunt's third and best word for him. "Written to whom?" I muttered. "What's it got to do with the price of eggs?"

"Will you read it, Mr. Train? Please."

"Let's go somewhere," I said.

"Dear Mildred," the letter began. "We have never been friends, I know, and I'm sorry for that. You thought I mistreated Paul, that I broke his heart, but that's not true. He was a charming and graceful man, to be sure, and he had, of course, the family name, which stood for something then. But he was impotent; our marriage was never consummated. In those days it was never spoken of, never treated. Mildred, it was not my fault, as you have believed all these years."

I looked up at Weston. We were seated in a booth at a bar on Sansome Street. The light from a small bulb under a parchment shade attached to the wall was sufficient to see by. He was smoking, I was drinking a scotch and water. I'd missed a meal tonight, but I wasn't hungry. I read on:

"It follows, of course, that Andrew is no blood-kin of yours. You didn't even know his father. Our love affair was brief and violent, intensive and destructive as fire. To free himself to marry me he killed his wife and went to jail for it. He died there in 1941. His name was Anthony Wright. His crime was committed without my knowledge and certainly without my connivance. The details of his trial were reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, issues of November 17-20, 1932, should you care to look it up.

"Andrew has most of his father's scapegrace qualities, I'm sorry to say, plus many of his own invention. I know how you feel about 'family,' about 'blood.' I know you never married because you couldn't find a man who met your high specifications. And perhaps you were right. But it will certainly ease your mind to learn you owe Andrew no familial obligation. In fact, I or my shade would be deeply disturbed if you left him anything. He has not contributed a nickel to the costs of my confinement in this nursing home. I have not seen or heard from him in over a year.

"This is by way of a late-life confession. Mildred, I have returned to the Church after a long and painful life without its comforts. I heartily recommend that you do the same. Jesus *does* save.

"I have asked Oliver, who has been so kind and giving since my last illness, to convey this to you in person. His expressed reluctance

to do so will no doubt manifest itself as he hands it over. Yours in Christ, Ethel."

I rubbed my thumb across the signature, which would have been the last word written and thus the freshest, but nothing came away. The letter had been written by a fountain pen, something not often seen these days, and the hand that had written it was firm, even though the lines wandered upward across the page. It was undated.

I said gruffly, "When was this written?" He had had more than three hours to write it himself, or to get somebody to write it, since I'd left his apartment. It appeared to be by a female hand, but that was just a guess. It was written on the letterhead of a Berkeley convalescent home.

"Three days before she died—last month."

"That was before Andrew died?"

"Yes. Ten days or so."

"I can check all this you know, Weston."

"I wish you would."

"She left an estate?"

He laughed. "A few nightgowns and shifts. A book or two."

"A fountain pen?"

His sandy brows shot up. "I don't know. Possibly. There's a box of stuff I haven't had time to—"

"What killed her?"

"A massive heart attack. A blessing." He sighed, looking pious. "But you see, don't you?"

"See what?"

"Why I didn't deliver it as Aunt Ethel asked me to. What it would have done to Aunt Mildred if she'd read it. Why I'm glad you were waiting for me tonight. And why I had no reason to kill Andrew if merely gaining the full estate was my motive."

The envelope had been lightly sealed when he handed it to me. It was addressed to Miss Mildred Weston and in the lower left corner it was marked PERSONAL. Aunt Ethel's handwriting had been distinctive, old-fashioned, with large round capitals.

"You see, don't you, Mr. Train?" he repeated.

"Nuts!" I snapped. "I see one of the shiftiest bastards I've ever sat across a table from."

"But—"

"But me no buts, Weston. Take your letter and go." I shoved it across the table.

"You'll tell her?"

"I'll tell her what I have to tell her. Go, damn it!" I was as angry at myself as I was at him—and at Millie too. I had told her last night that I was one man, not a jury. But now I was twelve men, eleven of whom were firmly in favor of conviction with one in reasonable doubt—the pivotal point in law. "It could have been as Oliver said it was," this one argued, "and Andrew killed himself. Moreover, the letter does exonerate Oliver, doesn't it, removes his motive? I mean, just because you've nursed your dislike of the man into a passion."

I saw Millie at Nandino's at ten o'clock the next night, a Friday. In the buoyant TGIF ambience of the place, she looked good. And when I told her Oliver was in the clear, she turned positively radiant—exonerating the annoying twelfth man.

With the family escutcheon no longer threatened, I thought she might gain a new lease on life, but I was wrong. She was dead three weeks later—and the wheels of probate began to turn, making Oliver rich.

Late in September I had occasion to visit the *Chronicle* building and while I was there I looked up the 1932 issues specified in Ethel's letter to Mildred. I found no reference to a murder defendant named Wright, but it could have been, I told myself, that I got the dates wrong, or she did.

But I was on the third or fourth case since Millie's then, and so I put the matter out of my mind—where it stayed until on the third of November I received a letter from Paris, France. It was from Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Weston, and signed that way, formally. It told briefly of their happiness and how lovely Paris was in the fall and how much they both felt they owed to me. It was written, of course, by the same hand holding the same pen as in Ethel's letter to Mildred.

But it *still* could have been that Andrew killed himself and Oliver's twists and turns were merely the maneuvers of an innocent man defending himself as well as the family honor. Couldn't it?

Yeah, sure.

"Q"



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3-EC

"We can't make trouble for the poor man just because he was impressed by the decor," Heather argued . . .

ROLAND THE MILKMAN

by **JEFFRY SCOTT**

Hindsight told us how fishy it was and that we should have taken warning. What kind of name is Roland for a milkman?

In England, milkmen are special. Like the U.S. postmen, nothing from extremes of climate to outright civil strife is allowed to deflect them from their deliveries. Society may crumble, the sky fall, but open your front door of a morning and those white bottles will be waiting on your step, blandly smug, persistent callers.

Splendid fellows, our milkmen. (We won't go into their ribald folklore reputation as consolers of lonely housewives.) But a credible milkman has to be called something like Fred or Ron or Perce. Certainly not Roland.

If I'm going on a bit, it's because we are a family practically without family heirlooms—unless you rate a positively final final demand from a credit company that was tucked behind the clock and dates back to 1971. The document was still around, but not the clock. Nor anything else of much value that was narrow enough to maneuver out through our porch.

In other words, when Heather and I got back from vacation a few months ago burglars had picked us clean.

Our insurance didn't cover the full loss. It rarely does, and certain items such as the sea-jet necklace from Heather's great-grandma and my mother's silver spoons simply couldn't be duplicated.

A nice young CID man didn't exactly raise our spirits either. When I asked what chance there was of the thieves being caught and our stuff recovered, he whistled regretfully and shook his head. "Put it this way, sir—between ourselves I'll tell you that we get maybe ten in every hundred burglars, and each of them has done, well, maybe not a hundred jobs, but their tally is generally in double figures."

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Heather wailed, "If only I was sure I'd double-locked the door." She *was* sure, of course, but one can't help agonizing.

"They'd only have sneaked 'round the back, kicked your double glazing in and smashed the french windows," the expert told us cheerfully.

As Sergeant Diver was leaving after the second cup of tea, he asked casually, "Have you had any callers, tradespeople as it might be, who've been showing an unusual interest in the house lately?"

No, we said, not that we could think of. But half an hour later, through the ESP some married couples develop, we looked at each other and chorused: "*Roland!*"

You don't think of the milkman as a caller, though he's around six days a week and comes to the door for his money every Friday.

Two weeks before our vacation and the burglary, Roland had peered past Heather as she was finding the correct change in her purse and said, "I like that new wallpaper, Mrs. G. Washable, is it? It must have cost a fortune. You had a pro on the job—no amateur could match such a fiddly pattern where the sheets join."

Naturally Heather invited him in to inspect what a great job she'd done all by herself. My idea of the most important talent in home decorating is the ability to check the Yellow Pages and dial the appropriate number.

She'd told me about it later, rather pluming herself over a double triumph. Not just the wallpapering but the fact that Roland thawed enough to display admiration. He'd been bringing the milk for six years, and until then we assumed he was terminally surly or possibly a mute. One grunt if the weekly money was right, two grunts when change was required, two grunts and a sniff at Christmas, when by tradition one gives the deliverymen a pound or so.

I wanted to phone Sergeant Diver but Heather talked me out of it. "We can't make trouble for the poor man just because he was impressed by the decor," she argued.

Some time later I saw Diver at the shopping center, though, and asked him whether inquisitive tradesmen were significant.

Diver sighed and gave me a pitying look. "Of course they are, sir. Some burglary teams use scouts—window cleaners, for instance—who can peer into every room and get a good idea of what's available."

After which I took keen interest in Roland. I found that four houses on our road had been burgled within the past year, plus three in Savident Rise and two more in Pasture Row. All of them on his route. Suggestive, as we detectives put it.

One evening I was on business at Harbottle, the local market town. Leaving the meeting, unlocking my car, I noticed another chap doing the same thing in the next parking slot. The car drew my attention, generating a passing stab of envy—a Triumph Stag, rakish and racy, not new because they haven't been built for several years, but beautifully kept and dripping with bolt-on goodies.

Belatedly, I realized that the driver was Roland.

Well, my look of surprise might have been a mite unflattering, but surely that didn't account for his expression: startlement, irritation, and what looked very much like a touch of alarm.

Then he grinned sheepishly. "You're thinking it's too good a motor for me, eh? I'm not married, see, and every penny I've got goes into this." He patted the hood lovingly, got in, and drove off.

It struck me as highly suspicious. Not the car, the conversation. Roland, our less than friendly neighborhood clam, had made a positive speech by his standards without me saying a word to provoke it.

Of course I shared the thought with Heather. If there's anything in the superstition about people's ears going red when you're talking about them, Roland's should have been crimson for days on end. But the frustrating part was that we couldn't do anything about it—not even change our milkman, because the firm for which he delivered was the only one serving our area. Further, Heather and I have a truly British dread of making scenes for no valid reason.

All right, we had a reason, but no proof. It irked us. I'd drive off to work and slow down at the sound of his electric-powered float humming and jingling along under the cherry trees lining our road, covertly watch him deposit bottles on a doorstep, and wonder whether his measuring glances at ground-floor windows were signs of professional interest. And if so, what profession?

Busy Lizzie rubbed salt into our wounds.

"Oh, no," Heather groaned one Saturday morning as we savored second cups of coffee over late breakfast. "What does she want now?"

The tone told me who was coming up the kitchen garden path: Busy Lizzie.

According to the old joke, a giraffe and an elephant are examples of animals designed by a committee. Mrs. Lizzel was a *woman* created by the same process. Head of a mule, hide of a rhino, and the inquisitive snout of a truffle-hunting hog. She was the sort of person who could knock at your door for a donation to Cancer Research and

ask where you worked, what you earned, and whether you meant to start a family while you were still feeding coins into the collection box.

Opening the back door before she could reach the knocker, I did my best to fill the gap. Somehow she ghosted past me. Busy Lizzie could have made a fortune playing football.

"Idle pair, you'll be late for work! Oh, it's Saturday, I was forgetting. That coffee *does* smell good."

"Do have a cup," Heather invited resignedly. Mrs. Lizzel had already sat down, filling her sensible cloth coat as a sausage fills its skin, no particular apparent age, dry-skinned and wet-eyed.

"Well, I will since you press me. Fresh-ground, not out of a jar! I wish *I* could afford that! But then, you'll have had your insurance after that dreadful burglary."

"It came to six hundred pounds less than we had to pay for luxury items like cutlery and all the kitchen stuff, TV set, music center," I started.

Heather sent me a warning frown. She was always worried over offending Busy Lizzie. It was a bit like fretting over snubbing a Sherman tank, in my opinion.

Heather would say that the woman was an amateur social worker who did a lot of good, but to me she was a professional pain at the best of times.

"The thing is," Busy Lizzie announced, "dear Roland has got another job."

"Good," I snapped.

She nodded, in a faintly puzzled manner. "Yes. Now you're newcomers, but I can testify that Roland has been our milkman for more than a decade. He's a bit backward in coming forward, very few people know that he's leaving us—"

"Except you," I remarked blandly.

It went over her head. "I *always* know what's going on," Busy Lizzie giggled. I reflected that with regard to Roland she didn't know the half of it.

"Despite his rough exterior, Roland has a heart of gold," Mrs. Lizzel droned on. She even seemed proud of her cliché, probably believing it to be fresh-minted insight. "And he's very sensitive. I know he'd be very hurt if the community didn't show their gratitude. So I'm getting up a little collection for him."

Heather choked on her coffee. "He's done pretty well with his own little collections," I muttered.

"Beg pardon?" Busy Lizzie's head cocked alertly.

I mused on the law of slander and the fact that Roland had several inches, pounds, and years on me. Accusing him of being either a burglar or a scout for burglars would not be clever. Broadcasting it via Radio Lizzie was downright daft. "Nothing, Mrs. Lizzel," I said. "you were talking about a collection?"

"That's right. Nothing too much, more a token. Most people are giving two pounds."

Roland had at least three hundred houses on his route. Some token! Busy Lizzie produced a clipboard, a crayon, and a large, fairly well filled manilla envelope.

"Quite painless," she giggled.

Heather and I spent the next half hour agreeing how wrong she was. We'd paid up—there was little choice between that and having her brand us cheapskates throughout the neighborhood. But it rangled.

As I say, Roland was a big fellow. But the following Monday, when I emerged to find him depositing full bottles and retrieving the empties, I couldn't resist a dig. He must feel a twinge of embarrassment, getting gifts from the people he'd exploited. "Seen Mrs. Lizzel yet?" I asked coldly.

He paused, frowning.

"No. She's gone away." Then he put the empties down again. "Something funny about that woman."

"She's the biggest busybody between London and the Scottish border."

"I didn't mean that way, Mr. G." Roland shrugged and added broodingly, "No, there's something wrong, not on the up-and-up."

Which was rich, from him. "You'd know all about that," I agreed, acidly as possible.

His response took me aback. "Fancy you knowing that, Mr. G. I never took you for the noticing sort."

My wild notion that he was confessing was shattered as he went on: "I doubt whether more than a dozen of my customers realize I'm a Special."

He mistook my sagging lower jaw. "Special Constabulary, volunteer part-time police," he explained, needlessly.

"Oh," I said eloquently. "Ah. Yes."

Roland might be a Special Constable and a crook, but it didn't appeal to me as a theory. My head spinning, I had to readjust my

picture of him. He was just a rather shy or surly chap who'd taken an interest in Heather's wallpapering skill not long before, by chance, we'd been burgled. I felt ashamed of myself. "Anyway, good luck in your new job," I told him warmly.

Roland put the bottles down again, less patiently. "My what?"

"Your new job—you're going away—"

"Are you trying to be funny?"

"No, we've all chipped in for your going-away pre— Busy Lizzie!"

It took two minutes to explain and another minute to reach Mrs. Lizzel's house at the corner.

She wasn't there. Nobody was there. It turned out that she'd flitted, owing nearly a year's rent, having sold all the furniture and fittings, most of which were on rental. Roland's retirement collection was both her little joke and her traveling fund.

"I must have made it too obvious, snooping on her," Roland mourned. "All those burglaries got me thinking, Mr. G. So I checked up, and Mrs. Lizzel had talked her way into very house that was done." I groaned under my breath and Heather nodded tragically. Roland looked at us. "Go on, d'you mean it never crossed your mind? How somebody getting past your front door could be reporting straight back to thieves for money?"

It was a time for honesty, air-clearing, full confession. Heather's glance reinforced my conviction. Roland was hulking and far from forthcoming, but he was sure to see the funny side.

"No," we said in chorus, "it never crossed our minds."

"Q"

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THE PHANTOM OF THE SUBWAY

by **CORNELL WOOLRICH**

Delaney boarded an empty northbound train at 125th Street by the simple expedient of loosening a chain across the station platform that barred his way, instead of dropping a token into a turnstile. The little metal disc attached to his cap, bearing the numerals 01629, gave him the privilege of doing that. That disc was his by reason of the fact that he was a subway guard.

He pulled a folded tabloid out from behind the panel in the car vestibule and, scorning to assume duties which were still rightfully the night shift's, he sprawled comfortably on one of the seats, legs out before him. The pale pink newssheet engrossed him while the train rattled its way to the end of the line, to start back and meet the rush hour. It was full of topics that had very little bearing on himself and his daily surroundings, such as storms at sea, airplane mishaps, the shapely limbs of a Miss Beaumont who had just flown in from Hollywood, and also a great deal about a "phantom burglar" who was being besieged by the police in the Wadsworth Building, on lower Broadway.

The man had been in there ever since the small hours of the previous night, had ransacked five offices singlehanded to the tune of \$500,000, killed the watchman, and they still hadn't been able to lay their hands on him. A cordon had been thrown around the place, the paper said, and it was just a matter of time—time and a mere fifty or sixty floors to cover—before they caught up with him.

Delaney, reading it, felt vaguely cheated. Up above there was

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always something doing; down here, below ground, nothing ever happened—you were like in your grave already.

As they pulled in at the end of the line, he put the paper back where he'd found it, stirred his stumps, and presented himself and his passbook to the factotum who detailed the personnel off the various southbound trains.

"Last section, third train out," he was told. They were all expresses this far up; the locals didn't go beyond 137th Street. The headway, during the rush hour, was a train every two minutes.

This rite—"shenanigans," Delaney termed it—attended to, he joined his mates on the benches until his own train pulled in. It was a "ghost" train, without a soul on it so far. He stepped aboard and placed himself exactly over the coupling irons of the second and third cars from the end, one foot on each platform, like a sort of Atlas astride his own little world. The time bell rang and he bore down on the pneumatic lever. Six doors in all, three to the left of him and three to the right, slid sibilantly closed. The train pulled out. Another day had begun.

One station down and the train was no longer empty. Before it dove under at Dyckman it was jammed. At 96th it was a madhouse on wheels, and at Times Square the riveted seams of the steel cars threatened to open.

That was the highwater mark, then the ebb set in. After Wall Street, Delaney himself was sitting down again, reading another tabloid that someone had left behind. This was a six A.M. edition; they hadn't caught up with the "phantom" yet. They'd got to the top of the tower by now, but he'd miraculously slipped through them somehow, and he was on his way down. But he was still in there, and the cordon down at street level had been reinforced. They were going to keep the personnel out, and they were sending in tear-gas bombs. The police order now was to give him no quarter, shoot him on sight; for he'd chalked up his second killing, one of their own, trapped in an angle of a dead-end corridor and plugged in the back.

The strangest thing about it was that nobody knew what he looked like. The only two who had caught a glimpse of him were dead before they could tell—hence the "phantom" tag. Delaney doped this out laboriously for himself while his ears hummed as he plunged under the river for the first time that day and hit Brooklyn.

At the other end of the line, with a twenty-minute relief on his hands, he changed his six A.M. edition, which was stale already, for

one that had just hit the streets, hadn't been born yet when he got on the train uptown. He took it upstairs with him for a smoke and a shot of fresh air. Miss Beaumont's legs were still there, but they'd lost ground; the Phantom had shoved them from the first page back to the third. He rated a scarehead now. He'd cheated the cordon of police, got out, loot and all. From an extension onto the roof of a church next door, as closely as they could figure it. Then down into the church through a lovely stained-glass skylight, which now lay all over the floor in pieces.

The sexton had had sense enough to hide behind one of the pews, and had got a good look at him and thereby also lived to spill it. He'd watched him slip out, valise and all, and duck down the steps into the Wall Street station, which was right outside the door—with two score bluecoated backs in full view a building-length away.

By the time the sexton got over to them, and the stampede got started, they were just a flight of steps too late. The Wall Street West Side station is a single platform between the tracks, instead of a double one like most. Break one for the Phantom. There were two trains in together, going in opposite directions, which mightn't have happened all the rest of the day. Break two for the Phantom. By the time the cavalcade got down, they had their choice of tail-lights, which didn't tell them a thing.

The station agent headed the downtown one off by telephoning Clark Street, and it was held sealed when it got there and drag-netted, but the Phantom wasn't on it. They couldn't catch the uptown one in time, even by telephone, for the Fulton and Park Place Stations were too close; but when they finally stopped that train and gave it the works at Chambers Street, the Phantom didn't turn up there either. He'd had two ganged-up stations to slip off at, though none of the other passengers they quizzed remembered seeing anyone with a valise, and neither did the station agents in question.

The chase had shifted to Delaney's own domain now and his interest was whetted; a second-hand thrill was better than none at all. It was coming closer all the time.

Just before eight, the paper gave as the time the getaway into the subway had taken place. Delaney began to calculate absorbedly, sitting on an empty ginger-ale case by the station exit. He himself had made Wall Street at about eight sharp, leaving on a 7:20 headway as he had. Trains make poorer time during the rush hour, on account of the gangs getting off at every stop.

"That southbound one," he told himself disappointedly, "musta

been the one right ahead of me. I musta got there two minutes after he lammed. Just my luck. It wouldn't be my train he picks—but somebody else's! I must have the Indian sign on me."

He pocketed the paper, disgusted, and reported downstairs for the return run. The fact that the guy was armed and had already killed two men in cold blood didn't lessen Delaney's sense of personal grievance. He felt that he had been dished out of the little excitement there was to be had. "Just one train up, and I coulda maybe had him riding with me!"

The time bell pealed and he slammed his section shut with a face that would have soured milk. The long haul back got under way. The outer stations came and went: Church, Sterling, President, Franklin.

Then Eastern Parkway showed up. Now at Eastern, the West Side lines do this in-bound: two branches fork together. A five-car section coming in from Flatbush Avenue, a half train, waits there for a five-car section coming in from New Lots; they're hooked together to make a full train, ten cars, and cover the rest of the route in one. Outward-bound it's reversed: at that point they split.

Delaney's half got in, waited, and its complementary half showed up behind it on the dot, kissed it with a slight jolt. The coupling crew jumped to its duty, compressed air hissed, and the two sections were joined. The second motorman, dispensed with, went off duty. Delaney's post automatically shifted one car back, to take in what had formerly been the control car. This brought him to what had been the rear platform until now, not used by passengers getting off or on.

It was when he had stepped back from leaning out between cars to catch the signal, and they were already under way, that he first saw the thing, standing by itself in the corner of the vestibule. A dingy, dog-eared cowhide valise, flush with the door. It didn't click, didn't mean a thing at first; it was traveling *in* toward Wall Street, *not* out away from there.

Yet he couldn't understand how it could have been left where it was. That end door hadn't been in use until now, and no one had got on carrying a bag like that since the return trip had begun. He would have seen it. When they did bring stuff like that on, they kept it right under their feet or close to one of the doors in operation, didn't lug it all the way out of sight to the back platform.

Whatever it was, it was in the way, blocking the door. He slurred

it with his foot across to the other side of the vestibule, then stood in the doorway and gave the car in general a dirty look.

"Whose suitcase is that?" he megaphoned. "Whaddya think this is, a baggage car? Clear it outa here!"

The sprinkling of passengers looked up interestedly—but blankly. They consisted of a Western Union messenger, two matrons headed for shopping, a sleepy youth who had been ladling orangeade all night, a pair of chattering Puerto Ricans, and an old man with a long beard who believed in the second coming of the Messiah and was dropping pamphlets on everybody else's lap. No takers—none, that is, for the mysterious valise.

Delaney went back again to open for Grand Army Plaza, then when that was out of the way, stood staring at the thing, thinking it over. Suspicion became a certainty, little by little. He'd found it on the side that opened for Wall Street; almost all the rest, the whole length of the line, opened on the opposite side. No one to claim it; no one riding in with it. There was only one answer—it didn't belong on this trip. It must have been brought on during the run before, overlooked at the end of the line by the crew jumping off; and now it was starting back again. It was hard to believe, a thing that size, but maybe with that metal partition swinging loose in front of it they hadn't spotted it.

He glanced up at the car number—3334. They shuffled the cars around a good deal at the end of each run, he knew; coming back he might have been assigned to what had been the train ahead of his the last time, without knowing it. And if so, maybe that thing in the corner over there had half a million in it this very minute!

He went over to it, tried the two latches; but they were locked tight. He picked it up, tested its weight—hard to say what it had in it. Even if it was what he took it for, he still didn't get the idea. It meant this "Phantom" had sent his loot sailing at Wall Street and hadn't gone with it. That sounded screwy. Robbing five offices just to give the haul a free ride by itself on the subway? Unless he had someone working with him, waiting at the end of the line to pick it up. If he had, something had gone wrong, for here it was on its way back again, unclaimed.

Which meant it had run the gauntlet twice, not only at the end of the line when the cars were cleared, but before that at Clark Street when the police had halted the train and gone through it, looking for the murderer. It could have happened at that, incredible

as it seemed. They were looking for someone fitting the sexton's description, first of all, and the valise was only incidental. Not finding him, the suitcase itself could easily have escaped their attention, hidden under people's legs in that milling, half-hysterical crowd. They'd had all the doors to watch, and ten packed cars to wade through, and not much time to do it in. There probably wasn't elbow room to bend down and peer at the floor, even if they'd thought of doing so.

Delaney was beginning to understand what must have happened. The guy dove down the steps just a leap ahead of them. There were two trains in, one on each side of him. He must have had to do his thinking fast, no time to hesitate. He couldn't even count on the trains pulling out in time; they might be stopped right where they were and held there in the station.

He didn't know the sexton had glimpsed him in the church. The only giveaway, he thought, was the valise. Separate himself from that, and he was safe. So he plunged it into the downtown train, spun around, and dove into the uptown one without it.

People are always running for trains, why should that have attracted any attention? And on the downtown car vestibule they were probably crammed so close together, all with their papers up in front of their faces, that like the police they didn't see that he'd left something on the floor. And later, each one thought it belonged to the other fellow—until the train split up, and it became the rear platform, and there weren't any left any more. And the Phantom, of course, had had sense enough to lam out of his own train at Fulton, without waiting for them to overhaul it at Chambers.

So far, so good, but then what? No one parts company with five hundred grand that easily, whether it means the chair or not. Delaney discarded the accomplice theory at this point; they wouldn't have had any way of getting in touch with each other in time. The Phantom hadn't intended powdering down the subway, he'd just done it instinctively—the only hole in the ground there was for him to hide in. But for him to send his haul barging off like that on its own, there must have been some connecting link in his mind, some trick play, by which he could catch up with it later. Delaney refused to believe he had kissed it good-bye for good, not after what he'd been through to get his hands on it.

Now just what way was there for him to connect with it again? He certainly wasn't counting on it being turned in to the lost-and-found and then showing up later to claim it: that would be putting

his head into the noose for fair. "Can you identify the contents?" "Half a million in cash and securities." And he certainly was not fool enough to think that by taking a later train from farther up he could overtake the first one in time and get his hands on it again. He'd spend the rest of the day riding back and forth, always just one train too late!

But a guy like the Phantom wouldn't work that way.

No, the answer was this: he'd played a hundred-to-one shot, a thousand-to-one shot, had no other choice. He was waiting some place up the line, where this train would have to pass, waiting for that suitcase to come back to him undisturbed, overlooked! And he'd rung the bell, just this once out of a thousand times: it hadn't been taken off, it was heading back to him again! It nearly made Delaney's hair stand up to think of luck like that, of nerve to take a chance like that and have it come through!

But there was just one little remaining hitch to be smoothed away, at least in Delaney's own mind. How in the devil's name did he expect to know the right train, the right car, when it pulled up in front of him? They were all alike even to Delaney, and he spent his life on them. Had he marked the door in some way, so he'd know it again when it made the trip back? That was asking a lot, to expect a guy running for his life to have a piece of chalk or something ready in his hand for just such a purpose!

Just to convince himself, though, Delaney stepped outside at the next stop and scanned all three doors of the car. There wasn't a mark on them. But the answer came to him when he got on again—so simple that he'd overlooked it until now. How did the company officials themselves, anybody at all, tell one car from another? Why, by the number, of course—stenciled in big white numerals on the blackened lower pane of each end window. And this one was a push-over—3334. In that split second when the Phantom had wedged the suitcase aboard, he'd lamped the number beside the door—and that was all he had to go by; that was the one slim connecting link between him and his hot half million now.

He must have good eyes, all right, to count on glimpsing it in time, one car out of ten, as it whizzed in past whatever platform he was waiting on at this very minute! Still, it could be done.

They were coming into Clark Street now. Delaney bent down and picked up the valise. "Ain't it a shame," he mused dryly, "that I caught onto his little stunt, without nobody telling me nothing! Now

all I do is just move it one car over—and where is he? All his sweat and brainwork for nothing.”

Abruptly Delaney set it down again. “He’ll look in first,” he said to himself. “If he doesn’t see it, he won’t get on—figure his thousand-to-one shot muffed and it was taken off at the other end.” He scratched the back of his head. “I’d like to see what he looks like,” he decided. “A guy as tricky and nervy as all that! Hell, I got that much coming to me, after packin’ sardines in all day long.”

He left the valise where it was.

He wasn’t, he assured himself, endangering the money any by leaving it exposed like that. “He can get on, but he can’t get it off again while I’m on the doors. I’ll see to that. I just want to watch what he does—oughta be fun, break the monotony!”

A moment later, as they went under the river, he remembered that the fellow would be armed, had already killed two men who had tried to hinder him. He still left the valise where it was.

They blew into Wall Street, where the Phantom had last been seen, and nothing happened. No one at all got into Delaney’s cars there, though he stretched his neck both ways; they were all going to their offices at that hour, not coming away from them. He spotted a pair of cops still hanging around, one at each end of the platform, that was all.

At least it showed they hadn’t nabbed him yet. Delaney decided he must have a criminal streak in himself, the satisfaction he felt at that knowledge. Almost as if he was rooting for the guy—which of course he wasn’t.

As for flagging the bluecoats and turning the valise over to them, there were several good reasons for not doing it. In the first place, he was only surmising what it was, the regulations were that it was to be turned in at the end of the line. He was working for the company, and not the police.

Wall Street dropped back, and almost immediately Fulton showed around the curve. Delaney didn’t watch the platform as hard this time, was giving up hope of his theory being correct. His car hit about the center of the boat-shaped concrete “island.”

There didn’t seem to be anyone waiting to get on. Down at the end someone was standing shaking one of the chewing-gum slot machines, trying to get his penny back. It looked as though he was waiting for a downtown train, made no move toward this one. Delaney cautiously turned to look up the other way; there was no one at all up there.

When he turned back again, the figure had vanished.

Park Place ticked off, then the train slowed up for Chambers. The valise stayed where it was, unmolested. After Chambers would come a five-minute straightaway without breaks, all the way to 14th. Delaney gave Chambers a good once-over, up and down, from his vantage point. There were a couple of cops hanging around there too. A fat lady, whose girth would have been the pride of any side-show, accosted him just then from the platform.

"Doth ith go to Timeth Thquare?" she queried.

"It doth," he assured her.

She scowled, and proceeded to wedge herself aboard.

The bell was pealing, and he closed the door. He hadn't calculated on how much of her there was. Most of her was on already, but not quite all. The rubber-edged door nipped her stern slightly.

A moment later, as she moved on, there was a distinct sound of rending silk. A look of alarm crossed her baby face. "Eep!" she squealed, and started revolving slowly on her axis, trying to get a look behind her.

Delaney knew the type. "Now I'm in for it," he told himself resignedly. He was.

"I'm gonna weport you for thith, young man—" she began indigantly, as he stepped down to the vestibule and tried to look unaware of her presence. "I'm gonna thue thith company!"

This probably would have continued without a letup all the way to 14th Street, but Delaney happened to look past her just then to where the valise had been. He snapped to attention with a jolt. The bag was gone!

It was traveling down the aisle, had already gotten half a car length away in the minute his back had been turned, gripped by the same slouch-hatted figure he'd seen so harmlessly tinkering with the slot machine at Fulton Street. Pretending to fuss about a penny while he waited to pounce on half a million dollars!

So that was their "Phantom," was it? Well, he didn't look like much from the back—just a wiry little fellow going some place in a hurry. But Delaney wasn't letting it go at that. He was going to get a look at his face or know the reason why.

"Hey, you!" he bawled, and his voice went booming down the car. "Drop that!"

A face flashed white over one hurrying shoulder. Even at that distance Delaney could see there wasn't any fright in it. There was only cold-blooded, grinning death. The fat lady was in his way,

monumental, wedged in the inner doorway—and that probably saved Delaney's life.

Before he could get past her and leap after the man, as he was primed to, the answer to his hail came back—and not in words. There was a second flash over that shoulder—smaller, brighter this time—a whipcrack that topped the roar of the train. A white sworl powdered the glass of the vestibule door just behind Delaney. The door had slipped partly free with the motion of the train.

The fat lady promptly fainted, but fortunately sideways onto the nearest vacant seat. That cleared the aisle. But the figure in the loosely flapping topcoat had already bridged the platform into the next car. He banged the communicating door closed to hamper Delaney, and the glass shattered. Delaney came plunging at it, tore the frame out of the way, and opened the back of his hand in a thin red line.

The lights of Chambers Street had just fallen behind the last car—it was a long station and the whole thing had happened in a flash—and there had been two cops on the platform there. He leaped upward and sidewise in the second vestibule, gave the emergency cord a yank that buckled it into a long loop. If they backed up a few yards, they could get help aboard from the station.

The fugitive had increased his lead to a whole car length now. He seemed to glide between the scattering of frozen, stunned passengers, immune to touch. It was Delaney following after, capless now, with his grim face and bleeding hand, who sowed panic. Women jumped up on the seats with both feet, screaming, then herded toward the back of the train, all trying to get out of the car at once.

The express slurred to a crazy, jolting stop as the signal reached the motorman. Some of the passengers were thrown to the floor.

"Get out on the rear platform," Delaney shouted over his shoulder. "Sing out for help—they may hear you back at the station!" Whether they understood or not, he couldn't tell; he didn't wait to find out.

The fugitive was a car and a half ahead now. Half a million can weigh very little, when it's going to be all yours. The man was out of Delaney's section by this time. A weird silence had overtaken the stalled cars the minute the motion went out of them—all but the chirping at the rear. Delaney, without slowing up, megaphoned his hands and boomed ahead: "Sullivan! Stop that man! The guy with the bag!" It carried like a trumpet call through the still cars.

A minute later he cursed himself for doing it. There was another of those whip-cracks, and the smoke from it was still lazing overhead

when he got to the next guard's platform. Sullivan was sprawled on his back, a hole over his eye had just begun to bleed. Delaney jumped over him, swore like a mad dog as the sight registered, went plowing on. The hysterical passengers scattered like leaves in front of him, pushed out windows with their elbows, clawed their way out the other end of the car.

The distant figure with the valise, all that he had eyes for now, had hit the first car at last, couldn't go any farther. Delaney heard himself bellowing out loud like a vindictive bull. He'd never known a guy could want to kill another guy so much, until now. He was in such a red rage that the thought of the gun was actually a come-on instead of a deterrent. A bullet right through the heart, he felt, wouldn't have been able to slow him up now.

The front car came into focus before his smoldering eyes—and the killer had vanished, wasn't in front of him any more. Just as he leaped the platform-gap, the train gave a jerk forward, then plunged into full motion again.

Damn that motorman, why did he ignore the signal like that? He was cutting them off from help at Chambers Street—with 14th Street a full five-minute run ahead! The train picked up speed as it never did under the eyes of a station timekeeper; it was in full careening flight already, rocking from side to side.

There had only been a single man in the first car. He was crouched down at seat level now, pointing terrifiedly. "He went in that little doohinky there! He's got a gun, watch y'self, man!" Then he slithered out of the way.

Delaney had known already he was in there, in the booth with the motorman. It was the only place left for him to go, unless he took a jump down forward under the whistling wheels. Delaney lunged at the metal door with his shoulder, heaved. It held fast. He must have wedged his body against it, since there was no way of locking it on the inside.

Delaney roared through the crack, "Stop the train, you fool! Cut the switch!"

It wasn't the motorman's voice that answered from the other side of the partition, cold, distinct above the tunnel-roar: "Get away from that door or I'll let him have it! You'll be on a train *without* a driver!"

And then the old fellow's voice, crazed with fear, "Delaney, for God's sake, do what he says—he's got a gun at the back of my neck!"

A green all-clear signal winked by beside the track outside. They'd

have a few more of those, Delaney knew, but in a minute or two they'd be getting red ones as they overtook the train ahead. And they were bound to if they didn't stop. The headway was longer now than during the rush hour, but the rate they were going would use it up in no time.

He tried to warn the maniac in there of what would happen, continuing to heave at the door while he panted, "You can't get away with it! You'll pile us up on the train ahead!"

The panel gave slightly and the killer's voice sounded from the inside, "Show me how it works! Come on, show me how it works—and I'll do the handling!"

The train slowed momentarily, as the contact broke, then picked up speed again as it was resumed.

There was an insane laugh that froze Delaney. "That's all I need to know!" The panel fell all the way back in a flash, and as Delaney crouched to rush the opening, the old motorman toppled out into his arms, blood threading down by his ear. The booth banged shut again behind him and the train seemed to roar forward.

Delaney eased the overalled figure to the floor, dragged it back out of the way. "Pop! What'd he do, shoot you?"

But it wasn't a bullet wound, it was a vicious blow with the butt of the gun that had knocked him out. Meaning, probably, that the skunk was running low on cartridges, wanted to hang on to the few he had left.

Delaney didn't know much about guns, but he remembered that the fellow was carrying a revolver, and that six slugs was all one packed. He'd shot two off in the Wadsworth Building and two just now in the train. Unless he had a second gun or a pocketful of refills, he had only two left. But a hell of a lot of good knowing that did, with the lights of Canal Street coming by and then another double green track-light right after that. Red was due any moment.

Delaney leaned across the prostrate motorman and stuck his head out the open upper half of one of the windows. And there it was, still way up the track, but already visible—two midget dots of warning, one above the other, at right-angles to the tunnel wall. And beyond that, almost invisible in the gloom, a cluster of even tinier ruby pinpoints, where their predecessor was slowing up as it neared 14th Street. Two, maybe three, local stops away yet, but they'd be on top of it before it could pull out again!

He let the impregnable booth go hang, turned and fled down the deserted aisle toward the back, as all the passengers had done before

him. But he wasn't thinking of his own skin. The second car was empty too, but at the end of that the bolder and more curious among them were huddled, peering up ahead with blanched, tense faces. They started to scatter again as he bore down on them.

"Metal!" he shrieked. "One of you—gimme something made of metal—anything, to throw a short circuit!"

They didn't understand him, or were too frightened. Another local stop gleamed by, and beyond it the two red stop-signals were already the size of dimes.

The fat lady who had involuntarily saved his life once was hunched there, shaking and sniffing. He clawed at her throat and she gave a screech of terror, tried to waddle away. The long silk scarf she wore tucked about her whipped off in his hand, yards and yards of it. He ran back toward the first car, trailing it after him. The red light came abreast, shot past them.

He rolled the thing up into a big loose ball, ducked past the control booth with it, and dropped flat on his stomach over the lip of the open front platform. His head hung down over the edge. Up ahead, the taillights of the next train were square now and expanding every second. Either the guy deliberately intended to commit suicide rather than be caught, or he didn't know how to stop any more.

But right while Delaney lay there with the big fluffy bunch of silk poised in his hand to pitch at the shoe that gripped the third rail, and stall them, the Phantom gave him the answer. He broke out of the booth just in back of Delaney, valise still in one hand, something else now in the other. The control-key that shut off contact. He'd brought it out with him!

He pitched it at one of the windows. There was a slight crash, and it vanished. They couldn't stop now, there was no way—not from the control room, anyhow.

He streaked toward the back, gun out again to replace the key he'd thrown away. He was going to let it happen, callously sending dozens of people to death or painful injury, simply to better his chance of escaping in the resulting chaos! That was the idea, another of those thousand-to-one shots of his! To beat the crash to the end of the train, toss his suitcase off the rear platform, drop off after it himself, and if he survived the fall, make good his escape up through the nearest emergency exit.

And survive he probably would at that; it was just the kind of freak luck he'd been running in for twelve hours straight now. What

would a few lacerations or bruises mean to him, living on borrowed time as he was?

The gods of blind chance would probably see him through; they seemed to be all for his kind of reckless fool.

Delaney dropped his head downward again, concentrated on the shoe gliding along the third rail, below and off to the side of him. One thing at a time—there were human lives on this train, and on that other one up front there, and they counted for more than even half a million dollars.

Three times Delaney swung his arm out ahead of him with the rumpled mass of silk, that excellent conductor, foaming out of his hand, and three times swung it under and downward—without letting go. If the rush of air deflected it, carried it harmlessly past the shoe straight down the middle of the trackbed—

But there wasn't any more time left, not even enough to hesitate. The taillights ahead were only a train length away by now. He could look up the aisle of the end car already; it was like a small lighted tunnel telescoped within a bigger black one. Let the gods of luck give somebody else a break for a change!

He opened his hand, let go, with just a fillip to the right to carry the silk off-center. It streamed out and downward, opening as it went. It hit the third rail just inches ahead of the shoe, whipped from sight, and seemed to be sucked in under the rail guard.

Then there was a warning spatter of sparks. The whole tunnel turned blue as though a giant flashlight picture had just been taken down there under the car truck. And then a report like heavy artillery that put the Phantom's puny pistol cracks to shame.

The blue glare went out again as suddenly as it had flared up, but the cars were already jarring to a sickening halt. Delaney had been given his break. He had short-circuited the train.

He nearly went sailing off through the open platform door with the suddenness of the lurch. He caught the single chain with one upflung arm and dangled there, half in and half out. He managed to squirm back in again, scrambled to his feet, and plunged down a car aisle that had turned dark now and was filled with a thin layer of acrid smoke drifting lazily rearward. The train lights had gone with the power, but a single automatic emergency bulb gleamed dully just above the vestibule of each car. He thanked God for them, for the passengers' sake if not his own.

They'd all been thrown down by the halt, and they'd reached a pitch of terror by now, some of them anyway, that was almost an-

imal. But he wasn't concerned with them just now. He raced down the clear lane between their prone, jabbering forms that someone else had opened just ahead of him, with the wave of that deadly little gun.

He was in mid car, out of reach of the levers, when all the doors silently swung back around him. He knew who'd done it! The fellow was getting out the side instead of going all the way to the back. He must have remembered that there'd be a guard down at the end-section who might tangle with him. And now the train had stalled, it was no longer suicide to jump off at the side, in fact, easier and quicker than the other way.

Delaney spurred for the nearest controls, to try to reverse them again before the fellow had time to slip through, but by the time he'd done it, he knew it was too late. Leaning out at nearly a forty-five degree angle between cars, trying to pierce the tunnel gloom down that way, only proved the assumption to be correct. It was just the next car down that he'd made his getaway from, and the feeble radius of light from the bulb down at that vestibule momentarily outlined something moving away from it that instantly lost itself in the murk. But Delaney had seen that it was a figure holding onto a square shape and hopping awkwardly athwart the local tracks to the two-foot emergency runway niched into the side of the tunnel. And that led far down to where blue and white lights, one above the other, and a puff of gray daylight, marked an exit.

Well, he wasn't there yet! And he'd shot, maybe killed Sullivan, banged the old man on the conk, and tied up the whole line into a knot! Delaney reversed the controls a second time, and jumped down to the tracks himself.

The tunnel was black, but it looked red to him just then. Two long jumps cleared the local rails for him, and he caught the single hand-guard that hemmed the causeway, hoisted himself up onto the little narrow footpath. It was at about train level. Instantly the blue and white lights up ahead vanished. Something was between him and them.

Delaney sprinted along the straight, two-foot cement ribbon of foot-hold, pushing himself in toward the wall constantly with one hand on the rail that paralleled it. It was hard to make time along a place that narrow and tricky, but it was even harder if you had a valise to pack, he told himself. You'd have to scuttle along crabwise in that case, so it wouldn't trip you. He himself tripped once, went

down face forward, and all but fell down to the tracks three feet below. He picked himself up and bolted on, knees and palms stinging.

The exit lights ahead slowly rose in perspective as they drew nearer, cleared the top of the silhouette that had obscured them, and hit him in the eye like two moons. For the first time, then, he saw how close he and his quarry were. There was only about ten yards between them. The thumping and slapping of the suitcase as it was borne along were now clearly audible. The cars of his own motionless train were far in back of him by now; he was traversing the pitch-black empty stretch between it and the one behind, a local, also stalled and semi-lighted. Just ahead of that, though, were the exit lights and the gush of daylight that marked safety for the killer.

But Delaney already knew he'd beat him to it. That grip was hampering the fellow something fierce. The ten yards were down to about seven now, and the man's hoarse strangled breathing seemed to fill the tunnel.

Delaney made himself audible at last, though the other must have known all along someone was after him. "Come on, give up, I've got you now!"

A second later he'd paid for his overconfidence. One foot somehow got in front of the other, and he went down a second time. He managed to stay on the runway, but was flat as a mat.

Just as the floor came up and smacked him, the figure ahead whirled. There was a bang, a flash, and a thin whistle past where Delaney's head should have been.

One bullet left, and five yards between them. They were both motionless for a minute, half strangling for air. Delaney crouched, leaped at the man from scratch in a sort of long rising tackle that brought him up to shoulder level by the time they connected. The gun exploded again, but straight at the ceiling like a sprint signal this time, but with one of Delaney's hands at the wrist that wielded it, the other at the fellow's neck, pulling it together into a flesh necktie. The gun clicked harmlessly twice more in the air, then dropped to the runway with a clash, and bounced down to the tracks below.

Delaney took away his open hand from the fellow's throat, only to bring it back again hardened into a meteorite of a fist that drove between the other's eyes as though it had come all the way from another planet.

If any consciousness survived the impact, there was no sign of it. The wrist Delaney had been gripping jerked from his grasp, the

other's body went down flat over the valise that had been standing just behind him. The head missed the edge of the runway, dropped from sight, and pulled all the rest of him down to the tracks after it with a sort of acrobat's half turn and back flip, under the hand rail. The valise stayed on the ledge; but the Phantom stayed down below in an indistinguishable heap.

Delaney, about to jump down after him, was suddenly conscious of light flaring all around him, like an abrupt aurora borealis there in the tunnel. That local, not far down, was all at once blazing with light again, bleaching the tunnel walls. So was his own train, far up the other way. They'd ironed out the short-circuit and the power had come on again.

A puff of black, acrid smoke seemed to spurt from under the mound of clothes that lay on the tracks just beneath him, as though they were on fire. He turned his head away and leaned sickly up against the tunnel wall.

Later, trudging away from there, hauling the recovered valise slowly after him, the professional came to the surface in Delaney again. "Two shorts in a row," he mused despondently. "They'll can me sure when they find out it was me caused the first one."

"And did they?" asked his blindfolded train-mate Sullivan from the hospital bed that evening.

"I didn't let on it was me done it," answered Delaney, "but somebody must have tipped them off. They seemed to know it, anyway. They didn't dock me, though. Instead, all the higher-ups come around shaking hands with me. They said something about promoting me."

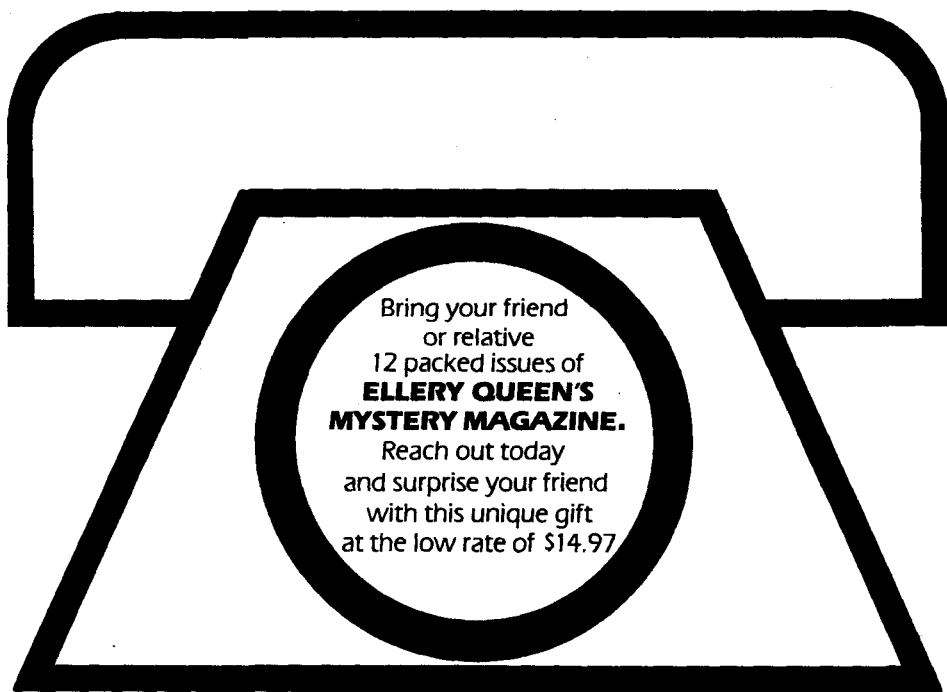
"Well, what're you kicking about?" the other asked. "You sound like—"

"It was bad enough before, riding the platforms," complained Delaney. "Now it'll be twice as slow, stuck behind some signal-board keeping tabs on the lights all day long! That's what a guy gets. He don't know when he's well off!"

"Q"

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SURE, BLUE, AND DEAD TOO

by **JANWILLEM van de WETERING**

The evening had passed and night was due, but it wasn't quite dark yet. Sergeant de Gier had noticed the mysterious moment of change and passed the information on to Adjutant Grijpstra. "Evening gone, night not quite come." He went further and drew the adjutant's attention to the faint coloring of the sky that curved like a tight metallic-blue sheet above the city of Amsterdam, iridescent in its entirety, intensified by the first pulsating stars.

"Quite," Grijpstra answered.

"Blue," Sergeant de Gier said, "but not your everyday blue. A most noteworthy shade of blue, don't you think?"

"So what are we doing here again?" Grijpstra asked.

"We're police detectives," de Gier explained, caressing his full mustache and delicately curved nose. "We're waiting for the heroin dealers about to meet and exchange merchandise for money."

"And when are they due?"

"We don't know."

"And what do they look like?"

"We don't know that either."

Adjutant and sergeant, members of the Amsterdam Murder Brigade, were assisting—because no murders had been reported recently—the Dangerous Drug Department. They were doing so

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quietly, dressed like innocent civilians, comfortably reclining in their unmarked blue Volkswagen, parked on the Brewersquare, opposite the Concertbuilding, pointed at the Museumsquare. They had been reclining for a while now.

"And how do we know that the dealers will meet?"

"Because," the sergeant answered, "Detection passed on the message. Our very own Detection, with the whispering voice of a handsome man like me, who in turn had heard another whispering voice—in the restroom of a better brothel perhaps. A large quantity of the evil drug will pass hands tonight. For us to see. For us to apprehend, together with the hands that pass it."

Grijpstra spilled cigar-ash on his neat pinstriped waistcoat. He also arranged his bristly grey hair. "Bah."

"Bah how?"

"Both in general," the adjutant explained, "and in particular. What can we see? The sky. Numberless passers-by. Do you honestly think that we would be able to spot a suspect popping up, parcel in hand, to greet and do business with another?"

"The sky is lovely," said de Gier. "Do look before the blue becomes black. Now is the time to be impressed."

Grijpstra looked up, grunted, and looked down. He grunted again, more emotionally.

"Nice woman," de Gier agreed. "Same color as the sky. Blue summer coat, blue scarf, blue high heels. I can't see her face but from her general bearing I would deduct she is crying. Why is she crying?"

The woman's hands dropped away from her face. "She's only crying a little," Grijpstra said. "We could investigate the mystery but we don't want to push our duty. A crying woman hardly disturbs the peace of our city."

De Gier sat up. "I feel like working. We were sent on a fool's errand. We aren't fools. I suspect the subject of being a prostitute and want to question her. Are you coming, Adjutant?"

"Prostitution isn't illegal."

"It is too," de Gier said. "*Here* it is. We are within two hundred feet of the Concertbuilding, which contains a bar. Prostitution within two hundred feet of a public place where alcoholic beverages are sold is illegal."

"Leave the woman in peace," Grijpstra said gently. "We're after heroin."

"Very well, Adjutant. But now look at that. What do we see? A handcart loaded with rags. Parked under a no-parking sign. And a

subject climbing into it. A most suspicious agglomeration of events." He put his hand on the handle of his door. "May I?"

"You may not. Leave Blue Pete alone."

"You know the subject?"

"An old acquaintance."

"Tell me about him," the sergeant said. "I feel a trifle restless. Your tale will calm me down."

"Anything to keep your youthful enthusiasm within suitable bounds.

"Some years ago," Adjutant Grijpstra intoned pleasantly, "when the local station here hadn't been computerized away, I happened to be behind the counter and Blue Pete came in, accompanied by his dear wife, a fat woman, just like mine. Maybe even fatter, if that could be possible. She pushed Blue Pete aside and lodged a complaint. He was part of the complaint, so she had brought him along."

"Yes?" de Gier prodded.

"If you interrupt me I won't tell the tale."

"Right. But over there goes a gentleman carrying a parcel. Does it contain heroin? No, it's a present for a loved one, adorned with a ribbon. Perhaps his wife has her birthday. Go on, Adjutant."

"Her name was Anne, Blue Pete's wife's was, and probably still is, and she was suffering from a venereal disease at the time."

"That was the complaint?"

"Part of it. She had contracted it from her neighbor and passed it on to Blue Pete."

"Shall I inquire about the nature of the contents of the parcel the gent is carrying? Now, look at that, will you? A well dressed, well educated gentleman, probably holding an important position in our society, on his way home where his wife awaits him, is bothering our blue lady. Just because she is crying. Let me arrest the scoundrel."

"He has stopped bothering her," Grijpstra said. "He's still carrying the parcel. Has he perhaps exchanged it for a similar parcel the lady was hiding under her coat?"

"No, I had a full view from here. Nothing passed hands."

"I never have a full view of anything," Grijpstra complained mildly. "Very well, Anne's charge was that her neighbor presented her with a venereal disease. She carried proof."

"She showed you her microbes?"

"Her pills. And a prescription for more, signed by her physician. Proof of her affliction."

"The complaint is not clear to me."

"Because you're too young," Grijpstra explained. "You're not familiar with yesteryear's laws. Whippersnappers like your good self gambol about while totally unaware of the great happenings. The present connects with the past. You have no past yet."

"Since when is the spreading of venereal disease prohibited?"

"It was during the war. A German Occupation law, to protect the Nazi soldiery."

"And Blue Pete?"

"A detached personality. Blue Pete drinks methylalcohol, a well known killer of microbes, and he only came along to support his wife in her struggle with the paramour next door."

The sergeant looked at the ragman, now settled comfortably on his cart. "You have a marvelous memory, Adjutant."

"Blue Pete showed up again that very same night, the night of the complaint. I was driving a patrol car through an alley and nearly ran into the blighter's cart. No lights. I was going to fine him but he did have a light, he said. He showed me a candle that he hadn't lit. There was a bit of a breeze, you see, and the light might have been blown out."

"Did you fine him?"

"Nah," Grijpstra said. "Mustn't bother the poor too much."

The sergeant looked out of the window again. "Not even when they keep breaking the law? Parking under no-parking signs? How sad it all is. And the blue lady is still crying. What could be the matter with her?"

"The fourteen/six?" the radio under the blue Volkswagen's dashboard asked.

Grijpstra grabbed the microphone. "Go ahead. This is the fourteen/six."

"Not correct," the radio said. "Even the Murder Brigade has to adhere to the rules. First you have to confirm your number and then you should ask me for orders."

"Yes, ducks. Sorry, ducks."

"Ducks?"

De Gier took over the microphone. "The fourteen/six here, Marie. Sergeant de Gier. What can we do for you?"

"Darling," the radio purred. "Do go to Headquarters. The constables guarding the building are being bothered by a man."

"We're on our way."

The Volkswagen veered away from the curb.

"And our heroin?" Grijpstra asked.

"Will wait for us," de Gier said. "The radio room is in Headquarters too, and who knows what will happen if that terrible man penetrates to Marie's whereabouts. She's a constable, of course, but rather vulnerable because of her beauty. Onward at once."

Grijpstra clutched the dashboard. "Please, Sergeant, this is an unmarked car. Nobody knows we're the police. Oh, Sweet Savior—"

"That pedestrian got away, didn't he?" de Gier asked, glancing at his rearview mirror. "Sporty type, climbing a tree now."

"Whoa!"

"I can't slow down for jayriding cyclists. Assistance to endangered colleagues is our most prized emergency."

"Red light ahead."

"Not any more."

"The streetcar!"

"Police always has the right of way and streetcars have powerful brakes. Ha ha, look at all those people sliding off their seats. Right, here we are. Headquarters."

"What's happening here?" Grijpstra asked.

"Well," the constable coming from the doorman's lobby said, "we're supposed to guard this building, right? This is no police station, this is Headquarters itself, but this subject walks straight in, drunk and all, and bothers us. What can we do? We can't guard the building and arrest him at the same time."

"But aren't there two of you?" de Gier asked. "You could arrest the subject while your colleague guards the building."

"The subject wants to be violated," the constable whispered.

"Violence," de Gier whispered, "is lawfully permitted under special circumstances, didn't they teach you that at police-school?"

"The subject is somewhat big," the constable whispered.

The subject was in the lobby, well over six feet, barrel-chested, and waving large fists. He was dressed neatly and swayed slowly. He smiled. "You're a cop too?" he asked the sergeant.

"Sergeant de Gier, at your service, entirely."

"Serve me," the subject said. "If you don't, I'll kill you. I already killed tonight—an innocent bystander. I deserve to suffer suitable punishment. I wish to wither away in a dank cell."

Grijpstra moved forward and addressed the other constable.

"Tell your side of it," Grijpstra said.

The constable backed out of the drunk's earshot. "He didn't kill

anyone, Adjutant, he just happens to have been indulging. He says he knocked someone down with his car on the Brewersquare, but we have our radio here and no accident has been reported in that area."

"When would the mishap have occurred?"

"An hour ago and he has been here ever since, yelling at us. How can we guard the building with the subject distracting us?"

Grijpstra breathed deeply. He reshaped his smile. "Constable. We're of the Criminal Investigation Department. We are highly trained. We learned how to count, for instance. Am I mistaken if I count two of you?"

"I'm not familiar with the ways of the supercops, Adjutant," the constable said pleasantly, "but we regular officers work in couples. My mate and I form just one couple—and couples, we were taught at police-school, may never be split. The subject is big. It will need a complete couple to arrest him. If we arrest him we cannot guard the building."

Grijpstra faced the drunk. "Sir."

The subject continued to sway and to smile.

"You're under arrest. Follow me."

The subject balled his hands to fists.

"Let's go," Grijpstra bellowed.

The subject hit Grijpstra. Grijpstra fell down. De Gier jumped forward. The subject's arm flew up and turned behind his back, yanked expertly by de Gier's arms. Handcuffs clicked.

"The subject is now a suspect," de Gier told the constables. "I suspect him of harassing the police. Watch him." He squatted next to Grijpstra. "How are you doing?"

Grijpstra groaned.

"Ambulance," de Gier said. A constable picked up a phone.

The suspect kicked. De Gier, still squatting, bent sideways and clutched the suspect's leg. The suspect fell over backward and hit the floor with the full impact of his own strength and weight.

"Take him to a cell," de Gier said. The constables dragged the suspect away.

A siren howled in the street. De Gier opened the door.

"Evening," the ambulance driver said. "You guys damaged a subject again?"

"A colleague is hurt," de Gier said. "Be careful with him, he's my friend."

"We're always careful." The driver turned to his assistant. "Ready? Let's pick him up."

Grijpstra opened his eyes.

"Don't relax too much," the driver said, "otherwise we can't get you on the stretcher. You're a bit heavy, you know."

"I'm not heavy," Grijpstra said, "and I have no intention to cooperate. I was out for a moment but I'm back again. Where's the suspect, Sergeant?"

"He's in his cell and you're on your way to the doctor."

"No." Grijpstra started to his feet.

"Grab him," de Gier said to the driver.

The driver shook his head. "Not if the patient refuses."

De Gier held his fist under the driver's nose. "Take him along."

He held his fist under Grijpstra's nose. "Be taken along. Your skull hit the stone floor and I want to know whether it's cracked or not. You can come back if the doctor releases you."

"Who outranks who?" the driver asked.

"I'm outranked," de Gier said, "but I happen to be more aggressive than he is and I'm good at judo."

"Let's pick him up and get out of here," the driver's assistant said.

"I'll be on my way too," de Gier said to the constables. "Have a good night now, the two of you."

The blue Volkswagen was parked on the Brewersquare again, opposite the Concertbuilding, pointed at Museumsquare. De Gier was at the wheel. He picked up the microphone. "The fourteen/six."

"Darling."

"I'm back doing what I was doing," de Gier said, "and I have a request."

"Yes?"

"Please ask one of the constables guarding your building to speak to me on the radio."

"Sergeant?" one of the constables asked a few moments later.

"Listen," de Gier said. "The situation was somewhat bewildering just now. What exactly was bothering your suspect when he first approached you?"

"An excess of alcohol," the constable said.

"Anything else?"

"He said he had run someone down on the Brewersquare."

"Details?"

The constable grinned noisily. "He ran down a blue one."

"What does that mean?"

"I wouldn't know, Sergeant."

"Thanks." De Gier pushed the microphone back into its clip.

Over there, de Gier observed, the blue lady is still crying. Patiently. Into her handkerchief. Seeing that no one is restraining me now, I'll go and find out what causes her lengthy grief. He got out and walked over.

"Good evening."

"Please leave me alone."

"I only wanted to ask you something," de Gier said. "I am a—"

A patrol car stopped next to the conversing couple. Two constables got out. They had left their caps in the car. "What's going on here?" one of them asked.

"This man is annoying me," the lady said.

The constables turned to de Gier. "We've been watching you for a while, sir. You were ogling the lady and now you're actually way-laying her. Move along—and be glad that we don't intend, for the moment, to pursue the misdemeanor."

De Gier showed his police card.

The constables edged him along the sidewalk. "Look here," the older of the two said, "even we aren't allowed to bother crying females. It's tempting, I will admit, for when they're in tears they're easy to push over, but we shouldn't, don't you agree?"

De Gier showed his watch. "You see the seconds change numbers?"

"Yes?"

"Five more numbers and the two of you are back in your car and driving away. I have to talk to the lady. Make yourselves scarce, all right?"

"I don't know whether you recognize the sergeant," the younger constable advised his partner, "but Rinus de Gier has just been declared judo and karate champion of Amsterdam. Let's go. Good evening, Sergeant champion."

The patrol car drove off. De Gier walked back to the lady. He showed her his police card. "Miss," he said in a low and pleasant voice, "you seem to be unhappy. Did a car run into you a while ago?"

The lady sobbed.

"Let's have nothing but the truth," de Gier said. "Crying only makes your eyes bulge. You have been run into by a car and you had a bad fright. Share your misery."

"No," the lady said. — "Do my eyes really bulge?"

"Not really. Would you like a cigarette?"

"I never smoke in the street."

"Smoke in my car."

The lady adjusted her skirt and drew on her cigarette.

"Well?" de Gier asked.

"I'll tell you. I'm having an affair with a certain Mr. Dams and he promised to marry me."

"He did?" de Gier said.

"So he would have to divorce his wife."

"He would."

"But he didn't. And I had enough of waiting. Tonight I decided to go to his house."

De Gier waited.

"His wife opened the door. I said 'I'm your husband's girl friend and I want to know about the divorce.' She let me in and he switched off the TV and looked at both of us. His wife said, 'What's this about a divorce?' He got up and went to the kitchen and came back with a bottle of gin and drank it all."

De Gier waited.

"And then he left the house and his wife said it was all my fault. I ran out of the house and followed his car, in my own."

De Gier waited.

"He could hardly drive but he managed to get as far as here and to park it. He walked off before I could park."

"Mr. Dams is a big man?"

"Oh, yes." She blew her nose.

"Three-piece suit? Wide-shouldered?"

"Yes."

"Where's his car?"

"The big Chevrolet over there."

"You saw him park. Did he hit anyone?"

"He drove over the island, where the pedestrians wait for the streetcar."

"Your friend, Mr. Dams," de Gier said, "has been arrested. He hit an officer. He won't be released until tomorrow morning. I would advise you to go home and sleep well."

De Gier unclipped the microphone. "Headquarters? The fourteen/six."

"Darling?"

"Could I speak to that constable again?"

"Sergeant?" the constable asked.

"Go to the suspect's cell and ask him about his accident. Then come back and tell me exactly what he answers."

Heroin, de Gier thought, brought me here and I haven't seen any trace of it yet and never will, I'm sure, for soon the Concertbuilding will empty and there will be thousands of people on the square and they can give each other parcels forever without me seeing any of it. Let's solve puzzles that can be solved. Like what's with the blue lady and her Mr. Dams?

"The fourteen/six?" the radio asked.

"Right here."

"Sergeant," the constable said. "Sure, blue, and dead too."

"What?"

"That's what the suspect said just now."

"That's all?"

"All."

If there's anything, de Gier thought, that really annoys me it's a simple situation I can't comprehend. Blue. What blue? Blue what? The lady was blue but the suspect didn't hit the lady. The sergeant looked out of the car. The cart loaded with rags was still parked under the no-parking sign. The rags were moving. De Gier got out.

"Is this where you sleep?" de Gier asked.

"I have a bed at home," Blue Pete said, "but my wife is in it and she's watching TV. I'd rather be here. Resting. Drinking a little." He held up a bottle. "Care for a sip?"

"Methylated spirits?" de Gier asked.

"The best Dutch gin," Blue Pete said. "What with welfare on the up again, methylalcohol has become too cheap for me. Pity in a way, I really prefer methylated spirits, the taste is a bit sharper."

"But you're still blue," de Gier said.

"That'll never wear off. Sure you don't want a nip?"

De Gier pushed the bottle away. "Tell me, Pete, did anyone happen to run into you tonight with his car?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes!" shouted Blue Pete. "Do you think I need to lie to anyone? With my welfare going up and up and up?"

"Pete," de Gier said. "Relax, it's a beautiful night. But someone drove into 'a blue one' tonight and you are blue."

"If I'd been involved in an accident," Blue Pete said, "I would have

made a fuss. Maybe I'm just a simple textile dealer but nobody drives over *me*, not even if the millionaire drives a brand-new Chevrolet!"

"Aha," said de Gier. "A Chevrolet, eh? The one over there, perhaps?"

"But it never drove into me," Blue Pete said, "it drove across the traffic island over there. It was stopped by the little pillar with the blue light in it." He laughed raucously. "And it had just been fixed. I watched a uniformed chap fussing with it with a screwdriver and pliers. Fixed it finally and bang, there comes the millionaire with the Chevrolet and bends it all out of shape again. Hoho."

De Gier walked back to his car. He thought as he walked. He changed his direction and investigated the pillar. It was bending over a few degrees and scratched, but the light still burned. He walked over to the Chevrolet. Its bumper was dented a little and some of the paint from the pillar was stuck in the dent. The sergeant slid back into the Volkswagen, sighing contentedly. Facts fitted once again. Here was Mr. Dams, an upright citizen trapped by another woman. Temporarily insane, Mr. Dams got himself drunk and hit a pillar. How easy everything was once seen from the correct angle.

He released the microphone. "The fourteen/six."

"Darling?"

"Hello, Marie," de Gier said. "Please don't call me darling. The channel is open—any police car can listen in."

"Yes, my beloved."

"Any news about the adjutant's condition?"

"A sore chin. He's on his way to you."

Grijpstra tapped on the window. De Gier opened the door for him.

"Nothing the matter with me," the adjutant said. "You forced me to make a spectacle of myself."

"I'm sorry," de Gier said. "I'll never do it again. Next time you're out cold on the floor I will stand on your head."

"Thanks," Grijpstra said. "How's our heroin deal?"

"What heroin?"

"Our original assignment."

"Ah, that." De Gier cursed. "I thought I had it all figured out—and now this." He pointed.

"Are you pointing at the man in the blue uniform opening the little door in the pillar with the blue light in it?"

"I am."

"What could be wrong with that? The man is employed by the Electricity Department and he's checking the pillar."

"I just found out," the sergeant said, "that the light was checked a little while ago. Besides, it's burning. What's he fiddling with the insides of the pillar for?"

"Replacing a fuse?" Grijpstra asked lazily. "Dusting connections? Scraping the socket? Should we care?"

"I think so," de Gier said. "Because he's doing none of that. He's removing some small cellophane packages. You go right, I'll take the left. Pull your gun."

The man in the uniform also pulled a gun. There were two shots. De Gier dropped when the shots went off and kicked the suspect's legs from under him. Grijpstra caught the falling suspect. Handcuffs clicked.

"He didn't hit you, did he?" de Gier asked.

"No," Grijpstra said. "But I hit him. He's bleeding from the chest. I don't think the cuffs were necessary."

"Come right in," the superintendent said. "The chief is waiting for you. Good work—but it's a pity the suspect didn't survive his arrest."

The chief got up from behind his desk and smiled down at his visitors. "Adjutant. Sergeant. My congratulations. The suspect has been identified and important clues have been found in his home which will lead to further arrests. What brilliant reasoning led you to believe that the man masquerading as an Electricity Company worker was your man?"

Grijpstra didn't say anything. De Gier was quiet.

"Well?"

"No brilliant reasoning, sir," de Gier said. "A melody perhaps—one blue note leading to another."

The chief smiled patiently. "Tell me about it."

Grijpstra reported.

"I see," the chief said. "Who put the heroin *into* the pillar?"

Grijpstra shrugged. "We didn't see that. The big dealer presumably."

"And the small dealer took it out?"

"So it seems."

"The pillar merely served as a third party? The dealers didn't want to meet?"

Grijpstra nodded. "The less they know, the less they can tell."

"And the lady in blue?"

"No connection, sir. Neither was Blue Pete."

"Yet the *events* connected," the chief said. "A typical example of proper police work. What do you think, Superintendent? These men are from your department. Don't you agree that they did well?"

The superintendent was standing near the door. He came forward and studied his assistants. His eyes rested on de Gier's brow. "You're pale, Sergeant."

"Blue," de Gier mumbled. "It's such a beautiful shade. It's pursued us all night, leading to death."

The commissaris led the sergeant to the door. Grijpstra followed.

"What was that?" the chief asked when the superintendent returned.

"An erratic statement," the superintendent said. "It's a while since you and I were assigned to street duty. After a violent death a colleague may tend toward erratic behavior." He looked out the window. The sky curved like a tight metallic-blue sheet above the city of Amsterdam, iridescent in its entirety, intensified by the first pulsating stars. "It's the blue hour again," he said to the chief. "Let's go across the street. You may allow me to buy you a drink."

DETECTIVERSE

IN DUTCH

by ELEANOR SULLIVAN

A sincere silent cheer
For Sergeant de Gier*—
Of men, one of the kindest,
And a quiet hurrah
For partner Grijpstra**—
Two of Amsterdam's finest.

*duh Kchreer

**Kchr-eh-ihp-strah

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

SPRING SHERLOCKIANA: This spring's most curious and intriguing Sherlockian item is a new version of *A Study in Scarlet* "based on the story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle," planned and edited by Simon Goodenough. Fashioned after the popular Crime Dossiers, it contains the notebook of Dr. Watson, annotated by Holmes himself, plus original diaries, telegrams, newspaper reports, and actual clues relating to the case. It's been published in England by Webb & Bower, with copies soon available in this country from Morrow.

Two other new books are worthy of note. *Simpson's Sherlockian Studies, Volume 1-9*, by A. Carson Simpson, is a one-volume edition of a privately printed annual (1953-1961), with a brief Introduction by Isaac Asimov. Trade edition is \$25.00, a limited edition signed by Asimov \$40.00, from Magico Magazine, P.O. Box 156, New York, NY 10002. *The Untold Sherlock Holmes* by William E. Dudley collects ten new essay-pastiches, with a brief Introduction by Edward D. Hoch. Trade edition is \$15.00, a

limited edition signed by Hoch \$25.00, from Hansom Press, P.O. Box 156, New York, NY 10002.

BOUCHERCON XIV: Chris Steinbrunner and Otto Penzler are hard at work on plans for Bouchercon XIV, which promises to be the biggest and best yet. It'll be held at New York's Barbizon-Plaza Hotel on October 21, 22, and 23, with special guests to be announced shortly. Advance registration is \$30.00 from Otto Penzler, Bouchercon XIV, 129 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019.

A few program books from Bouchercon XIII are still available at \$3.00 each from Don Herron, 537 Jones Street, #9207, San Francisco, CA 94102. Herron also wrote and published the handsome *Dash-tell Hammett Tour* book (\$6.95) mentioned here in the last issue.

NEW REPRINT SERIES: Two veteran mystery publishers, St. Martin's Press and Walker & Co., have launched new trade paperback series this spring, relying upon their extensive backlists. Walker British Mysteries are reprinting four titles each month, in-

cluding such well known authors as John Creasey, Marian Babson, John Sladek, Simon Harvester, William Haggard, and Josephine Bell. St. Martin's Fingerprint Mysteries published their first four titles in March, including Harold Q. Masur's *The Broker* and William L. DeAndrea's *Five O'Clock Lightning*.

JAPANESE FANZINE: For those who can read Japanese, the monthly Tokyo fanzine, *The Maltese Falcon Flyer*, is now available to overseas subscribers. A typical issue has twelve large pages and numerous photographs. A year's subscription is \$25.00 by seamount, \$40.00 by airmail, from Jiro Kimura, 2-10-11 Shimo-ochiai, #A-202, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, Japan. (In addition to editing the *Flyer*, Kimura recently launched the Gumshoe Book Club, making hard-to-obtain American and British mysteries available in Japan.)

FORGOTTEN MYSTERIES: Here's a really forgotten mystery, or at least a forgotten spy novel: *The Infamous John Friend* by Mrs. R. S. Carnett, published early in this century by Thomas Nelson (London) and recently rediscovered by Graham Greene. Writing in the Christmas-book issue of the *London Observer*, he called it, "Perhaps the earliest novel about a double-agent . . . Set in Napoleonic times, it is tragic, moving, and

exciting . . . It cries out for re-publication."

MYSTERY TRAIN RIDE: For the rest of this year, one weekend a month, a hundred mystery fans will depart from New York on board the Mystery Express, with an overnight tour that includes a staged murder, suspects, and a noted mystery writer on board. For details and reservations, write Mystery Express, P.O. Box 4225, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: The fourth of Margaret Truman's Washington mysteries, *Murder in the Smithsonian*, will be published by Arbor House in June. And in July the same publisher is bringing out the first collection of Lawrence Sanders' short stories, *Sometimes They Bite*.

Trevelyan's first new novel in four years, *The Summer of Katya*, will be published in June by Crown. And Dorothy Salisbury Davis's first new novel in three years, *Messenger with Ashes*, is coming this fall from Scribners.

Ruth Rendell's newest Inspector Wexford novel, *The Speaker of Mandarin*, is due from Pantheon this fall. It's her 25th book since 1964.

Best-selling historical novelist M. M. Kaye has a mystery, *Death in Zanzibar*, due this month from St. Martin's Press.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by **CHRIS STEINBRUNNER**

Raymond Chandler saw the motion picture as an intriguing method of exploring the dark corners of his story-telling skill, and in his Hollywood years mastered the craft with distinction—his very first screenplay was nominated for an Academy Award. Yet despite the impact his films, and the films made from his books, had upon the movie-making industry, he detested Hollywood and its ways, the way it swallowed the writer and robbed him of identity. Film critic William Luhr, in his new study, *Raymond Chandler and Film* (Frederick Ungar), discusses this Hollywood period and the way the author shaped what was to be called film *noir*, the significant American contribution to the mystery motion picture.

Chandler did not create the film *noir* cinematic style, but the mood he could so powerfully evoke—the grim, urban landscape of a world gone bad—adapted itself perfectly to this dark new kind of crime film, so reflective of the uncertain 1940s. His impact on the screen was meteoric: in a five-year period from 1942 six films based on his books were released, while he himself worked on screen projects with some of the most important creative forces in Hollywood.

But it was always a difficult collaboration; his associations with Billy Wilder and Alfred Hitchcock

were testy and quarrelsome. With Wilder the result was the superb *Double Indemnity*, a powerful, brooding adaptation of the James M. Cain novel with Chandler contributing an Oscar-nominated script. With Hitchcock events did not turn out as well: his work on *Strangers on a Train* was reshaped by another writer. He found the Hollywood system of writing—working in studio cubicles, often in collaboration and subject to endless conferences—to be intolerable. "That which is born in loneliness and from the heart," he wrote, "cannot be defended against the judgment of a committee of sycophants." The volatile essences which make literature are not born at studio conferences.

John Houseman, who worked with Chandler in Hollywood, remembered him as seeming extremely frail, but "it was not until later that you discovered the peculiar strength that lay behind his ashy, burnt-out look." The determination forced him into intractable positions with Wilder, and the two fought often as they hammered together their joint effort. But their mutual dislike did not get in the way of their respect for one another.

"Working with Billy Wilder on *Double Indemnity* was an agonizing experience and has probably shortened my life," Chandler wrote,

"but I learned from it as much about screenwriting as I am capable of learning." Wilder thought Chandler a perfectly miserable person, but far preferred him to a partner without talent: "Give me a collaborator like Chandler any day." He was taking a great risk in bringing James M. Cain to the screen, for the author's novels were thought daring and unfilmable. For *Double Indemnity*, a screenwriter strong in dialogue and a sense of doom was needed. The inexperienced Chandler superbly handled both, with the murky, ominous exchanges between Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck, plotting to kill the latter's husband, absolutely standout. The 1944 film, despite its gloom and hopeless, tragic finish, was wildly popular, and established Chandler.

So much so, he was given a free hand to fashion an original treatment for Alan Ladd, whom Paramount Studio was about to lose to the Army and for whom a movie was needed quickly. *The Blue Dahlia* was written by Chandler in a deliberate alcoholic haze (the only way he could create at speed), and although the film itself is flawed it still contains that dark power which clouds the *noir* landscape: an embittered Army veteran returns from service to find his world in shambles, his wife unfaithful. When she is murdered he tracks down her killer, but it gives him at the end little satisfaction—although the story's outcome is still more hopeful than *Indemnity*. Chandler's terrain caught the pessimism of the times; his script's final line (not

used in the film) is: "Did somebody say something about a drink of bourbon?"

Hitchcock's vision was different, and gave Chandler trouble, even though the novel they were adapting, Patricia Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train*, was suitably dark. The director always wanted to stop for romantic whimsey, and was impatient when it came to structuring mystery plotting. Amazingly, for the film now seems so easily fluid, the device of exchanging murders and its consequences caused enormous difficulties; neither Hitch nor Chandler could ever agree what should happen next. The director finally placed Chandler's script in other hands.

In other hands two of Chandler's books became landmark mystery films. *Murder, My Sweet* was the first to use first-person narration almost constantly, scene after scene, in a story told completely in flashback. *Lady in the Lake*, with Robert Montgomery directing and playing Marlowe, is told completely with subjective camera, the audience perceiving everything through detective Philip Marlowe's eyes.

But Chandler's contribution to the mystery film goes far beyond these devices. Even though he himself felt that the really good mystery film could not be made ("The detective in the picture always has to fall for some girl, whereas the real distinction of the detective's personality is that, as a detective, he falls for nobody"), his most enduring influence was in the style his work grafted onto the screen. The grim backgrounds, dark mood,

and unglittered realism mirrored its day and spurred a lasting cin-

ematic tradition for the American mystery.

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INTERVIEW: ROBERT B. PARKER (2)

This is the conclusion of an interview that began in the previous issue.

EQMN: You wrote your Ph.D. dissertation at Boston University on modern detective-story writers Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross Macdonald. What is your evaluation of these writers and have they and other writers influenced you?

PARKER: I think Chandler was the best to write this kind of detective story ever—including my humble self—and that eventually he'll be considered a significant writer of his time, not a serious mystery writer, just a serious writer of serious books. Hammett wrote one very good novel, *The Maltese Falcon*, one very bad one, *The Thin Man*, one quite interesting though not very pleasurable, *The Glass Key*, and two routine detective novels and a batch of mostly routine short stories—although there's a lot of energy in *Red Harvest*, *The Dain Curse*, and many of the Op short stories which make them better than they ought to be. He deserves the respect due to an originator.

Ross Macdonald made every effort to bring the detective novel into the mainstream of literary re-

spectability, and in his own case—cover of *Newsweek*, two front-page reviews in *The New York Times Book Review*—he has succeeded. Some of this is that his style has the kind of portentous overtones that people who think about literary respectability approve, but beyond that he has enlarged our assumptions about what was fit subject for a novel about a private detective. I've benefitted from that freeing of subject matter as much as anyone, and I have no way to know if without Macdonald I could have freed it up myself.

Beyond these three I'm influenced by the writers that influence most of us—Twain, Hemingway, Faulkner, and—particularly in my case—Scott Fitzgerald.

EQMN: Ross Macdonald has said that the subject matter in modern mystery stories deals with the worst things that can happen to people and the worst things people can do to each other.

PARKER: My subject is not that. I write about not only honorable behavior but about the possibility that honorable behavior can lead to a certain amount of human happiness. In my books I'm interested in man-woman relationships, the value and limits of code behavior,

how children are to be helped—maybe saved. I'm very interested in love, in male bonding, in the concept of responsibility. I try to examine in various ways the different stays against confusion that are available to us. I'm very hesitant to suggest that there is a subject for the modern mystery novel.

EQMN: What moved you to write about the "jock ethic" personified by Marty Rabb in *Mortal Stakes*?

PARKER: As I said, I'm interested in the various ways we define ourselves and the various systems in which we try to achieve certitude. I understand the jock ethic in both its value and its limitations and wished to use that knowledge in the making of a story. Very few people—preeminently Howard Cosell—understand the jock ethic, and most actively misunderstand it, just as most people misunderstand machismo. In *Mortal Stakes*, I took a whack at dramatizing some of its aspects.

EQMN: I suspect from your novels that you enjoy cooking as much as a person can.

PARKER: I like to cook okay, and have done enough, and done

it well enough, to know it's not terribly difficult. I've also been the family cook for a long time—and yes, feminists, I clean up. I also shop. Joan works and I am the house person. Of course, when one routinely cooks supper some of the excitement wanes but, as in carpentry and writing novels, I like to make things.

I cook much less now because the boys are grown and away—David dancing with the Gale Conrad Company and studying with Herce Cunningham in New York, Daniel a theater major at Sarah Lawrence. Joan works for the Massachusetts Department of Education and is often out in the evening and rarely home for supper. She's a "team leader," as those straight-talking educators would have it.

EQMN: You retired from teaching at Northeastern University as a full professor in 1978 and have referred to yourself as a reformed academic.

PARKER: I sometimes refer to myself as a redeemed academic as well. My impulse is satiric. I like to needle the old profession—which could take itself less seriously, and has reason to.



THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

In reviewing crime and mystery fiction (and perhaps even more so in writing jacket blurbs), the temptation to say too much is ever present and must be resisted. Unfortunately, though, it isn't always. Sometimes the giveaway is overt, especially in the case of mysteries published as mainstream novels like Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* and Irving Wallace's *The Seven Minutes*, many of whose reviewers felt no compunction about giving away their secrets. Sometimes it is by way of cutesy hints, whereby some early reviewers of Rex Stout's *A Family Affair* handed me the solution before I had a chance to read the book. Some very good mysteries have been hampered by a far too informative blurb, and in a semi-mystery of a few years ago, Eunice Walkup and Oscar Otis's *The Race*, the jacket artist was allowed to give away one of the book's key surprises: who will win the Kentucky Derby.

Of course, a novel whose whole effect can be destroyed by giving away the solution can't be much of a book—I for one appreciated Agatha Christie's trickery in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and *Murder on the Orient Express* no less for knowing who did it before I started. Still, surprise is so much a part of the pleasure of mystery reading that I sometimes look at a particularly original new book and think

I should say as little as possible (or nothing at all) about the plot, lest I spoil some reader's enjoyment by inadvertently telling too much. This is certainly true of the latest unpredictable novel by one of the genre's most original practitioners and a favorite of *EQMM* readers.

*** Celia Fremlin: *The Parasite Person*, Doubleday/Crime Club, \$11.95. Martin Lockwood, an unlikeable but fascinating central character, is a long-promising social science teacher, now aged forty and struggling with his Ph.D. dissertation while enjoying (he keeps telling himself) the thoughtful attentions of the mistress for whom he left his wife. The title refers to a sociological theory propounded to Martin by one of his interview subjects, a nineteen-year-old girl who has half-heartedly attempted suicide. The theory may (or may not) make his reputation. Beyond mentioning the theme of scholarly ethics, and the Fremlin style, character-drawing, and plotting skill, no more should be said. (The blurb writer says more, but not quite too much.)

*** Max Collins: *The Baby Blue Rip-off*, Walker, \$11.95. In his first hardcover novel, Collins introduces student and mystery writer Mallory (in the one-name tradition of the author's main characters), who delivers hot meals to senior citizens one night a week in his

small Iowa town. When one of his elderly lady friends is murdered and her house burgled, he turns detective to rout the local crime ring. Collins plots well as usual, but the book's strongest feature may be its feeling of nostalgia for the recent past. The set-piece on teenage-courtship rites circa 1960 is wonderful.

*** Julie Smith: *Death Turns a Trick*, Walker, \$11.95. San Francisco lawyer Rebecca Schwartz, a very likeable new feminist sleuth, enters the scene in colorful fashion playing whorehouse piano. She represents an organization called HYENA (Head Your Ethics toward a New Age), dedicated to the legalization of prostitution. The murder victim is a call girl, found dead in Rebecca's apartment. The first person narration has considerable charm, and the book leaves me eager for future adventures. (Any chance we can get Rebecca in court?)

*** Roy Lewis: *Dwell in Danger*, St. Martin's, \$10.95. Solicitor Eric Ward, whose glaucoma ended his police career and still threatens his sight, becomes involved in messy intra-family litigation over the conveyance of some farm property. The resultant trial comes to a halt following the murder of one of the parties. This is a solid legal mystery in a comfortable British tradition.

*** Anna Clarke: *We the Bereaved*, Doubleday/Crime Club, \$11.95. Here, too, a solicitor is the focal character: sixtyish Harry Johnson, one year widowed, who has a new chance to find the hit-run driver who killed his wife when an elderly client calls on him to draft a death-bed will. It's another of the leisurely, civilized British mysteries (undoubtedly *too* sedate for some tastes) that depends on character and atmosphere for its grip on the reader's attention.

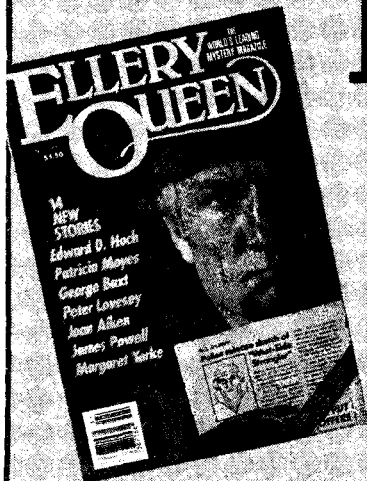
*** Michael Kurland: *Death by Gaslight*, Signet, \$3.50. In a sequel to the award-nominated *The Infernal Device*, Kurland presents a historical extravaganza involving a series of locked-room murders of prominent Londoners and an even more impossible train robbery. Professor Moriarty is the principal character, not only an antagonist of Sherlock Holmes but a rival sleuth—and sometimes even a collaborator. Holmes (without Watson in this book) has his problems here but is never made completely ridiculous. Kurland hasn't totally vanquished Americanisms, and his solutions are not in the John Dickson Carr league, but he tells a fast-moving story that can be recommended to admirers of Francis Selwin's Inspector Verity books and of Michael Crichton's *The Great Train Robbery* as much as to Sherlockians.

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Q

a **NEW** short story by

PATRICIA MOYES

There were Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. And here are Geoffrey and Arlette Browning, who, like the nineteenth-century Brownings, also have one son and also involve themselves in politics, but to whom fate is less kind . . .

FACES OF BETRAYAL

by **PATRICIA MOYES**

If you searched the length and breadth of the United States of America, it's doubtful if you would find a couple more suited to represent the American Dream than Geoffrey and Arlette Browning. They could have stepped, no questions asked, into an advertisement in *The New Yorker*—or, to be more accurate, *The Washingtonian*, for they lived in Washington D.C. In Georgetown, naturally—in a charming little house with a small back garden ablaze with camellias, a paved patio with white-painted wrought-iron furniture for summer drinks, and even a magnolia tree. They were both in their early thirties, both extremely good-looking (Geoffrey had dark-brown hair and gray eyes, to complement Arlette's ash-blond and blue) and they had one child, a little boy of two called Christopher.

Geoffrey and Arlette had met at college in the tempestuous Sixties and it was inevitable that they should both have been caught up in the left-wing student movements of the time, but both had soon outgrown the infection and had ended their college days as right-of-center preppies. Consequently, it was no barrier to either of them, when it came to entering government service, that for a few mad months they had marched and demonstrated and shouted anti-war slogans outside the White House. Geoffrey started his career as a permanent official at the State Department and rose rapidly. Al-

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ready it was being rumored that he would soon be knocking his head against the ceiling of non-political promotion and might well start taking active political steps with the idea of eventually running for Congress.

Arlette, married to Geoffrey at the age of twenty-one, had never intended to be a career woman. She got a secretarial job at the Pentagon, which she did so well that she also rose rapidly. Her job became more and more interesting, not to mention lucrative, and it was for this reason that she put off having a baby until she was thirty. However, when Christopher arrived, she gave up her job and concentrated on being a wife, mother, and hostess. The Pentagon hoped to woo her back when the boy was older. Arlette had not made up her mind about that one way or the other. However, she kept in touch with her old colleagues, and the Brownings' little dinner parties usually consisted of a fashionable mixture of important people from the military and political worlds. Everybody predicted a future for the young couple even rosier than their very satisfactory present. Of course, said everybody, they obviously had money behind them, and that was always a help.

What everybody did not know was the source of that money, or that there was a very different side to the picture. Geoffrey's family name had not always been Browning. His great-great-grandfather had fled to America for sanctuary after the 1848 uprising of Poles against the Prussians. His name began with the letters BR and then meandered off into a succession of Zs and Ks which completely baffled the immigration clerk. The latter, having already entered two infathomable names as "Brown" that day, became a little more imaginative and dubbed this family "Browning."

Of course, this was ancient history, and the Brownings had apparently become completely Americanized. Nevertheless, deep down and almost imperceptibly, a hatred of all things German passed from generation to generation. During the Second World War, in which Geoffrey's father fought with distinction, this loathing of Germany had turned into an equally passionate admiration of Russia.

Arlette's case was much more recent. Her young parents had escaped from France just ahead of the advancing Nazis. They came from well-to-do families—you had to be pretty rich in those days to get out of France in time. Nevertheless, there was only enough in the kitty to send the young people to America. Their parents stayed behind in Occupied France, tried to organize an escape route for shot-down Allied airmen, but were not very clever about it. They

were caught and executed. Arlette was born in the United States, but her anti-German prejudice was very understandable. And in her case, too, the heroes of the war were the Russians.

These feelings might have remained dormant had it not been for an extremely persuasive, clever, and charming professor who was on a temporary assignment at the college both young people attended. He recognized useful material when he saw it and began, with great subtlety, to work on both Geoffrey and Arlette. It was quite a time before they realized that he was an active Soviet agent; by then, they were both under his spell and up to their necks in Marxist ideology.

It was this professor who advised them to resign from all left-wing organizations and to build up a façade of such all-American conservative decency that it could never be questioned, let alone penetrated. And so the Russians gained two very satisfactory agents, one in the State Department and the other in the Pentagon, with access to all kinds of classified information that could be passed discreetly to the Soviet Embassy in Washington.

Naturally, when she resigned her job to have a baby, Arlette ceased to be of immediate use—but Christopher's arrival completed the ideal young family, and their contact at the Embassy (whom they knew only as Boris) gave his blessing. Possibly, Arlette might go back to the Pentagon in a few years. Meanwhile, the image was all-important.

The crisis came out of the blue, by one of those cruel coincidences which occur in life. Well, perhaps not entirely a coincidence.

A West German statesman, who had been causing the Soviets a great deal of annoyance, was visiting Washington for talks with the President. Boris, through his usual roundabout method of communication, had told Arlette to take Christopher along and join the small crowd of people assembled outside Blair House to watch the German gentleman emerge and be driven the few yards to the White House for his talks with the Chief Executive. There would be a police cordon, but a pretty woman with a little boy should be able to maneuver herself into a good position. All that Boris wanted was a few photographs, taken by the tiny camera fitted into the handle of Arlette's handbag. Not photographs of the statesman himself, but of his aides, his chauffeur, and his entourage. Boris did not explain further. When assigning a job, he never gave his executive agent one whit more information than was necessary.

What Boris himself did not know was that a group of young fa-

natics—openly Communist and violently anti-establishment—had decided to take matters into their own hands. Boris disapproved of the group, considering that it put all the members of his very delicate network in jeopardy. However, he hadn't been able to get them disbanded and they now acted on their own, without orders. On this occasion, they decided to demolish the West German statesman with an ingeniously placed car-bomb.

From their point of view, it was entirely successful. As soon as the door of the big black limousine closed behind their victim, he and the car were blown to smithereens. His secretary was also killed, but the chauffeur was miraculously thrown clear and escaped with minor injuries. Arlette and several other people at the front of the crowd of spectators were hurled roughly off their feet by the blast and taken to the hospital. Christopher, perched on Arlette's shoulder ostensibly for a better view but actually as an excuse for raising the camera to the desired height, was killed outright.

The news that his son had been killed and his wife injured reached Geoffrey before it was broadcast on radio and TV. The early reports spoke of several spectators injured and one small boy killed, but gave no names. The State Department was naturally involved and got the names ahead of the media. Deeply shocked and sympathetic colleagues suggested that Geoffrey leave at once and go to the hospital to be with his wife. Geoffrey left the office, but did not go to the hospital. Instead, he established emergency contact with Boris.

This was done by a simple device. There are many more than 365 public telephone booths in the District of Columbia, so it was quite easy to allot one booth to each day of the year. Geoffrey carried a diary in which each day's emergency booth was identified by a code that only he could understand. The accident happened on the sixth of October, the 279th day of the year. Looking under 279, Geoffrey identified the booth as the second from the left at the intersection of N Street and Wisconsin Avenue, not far from his home. He hurried there and dialed an unlisted number. A female voice answered him. He requested that Boris should call him back on the emergency number as soon as possible.

We already know that the attack on the West German was not the doing of Boris and his organization and had taken him entirely by surprise. However, it was not considered good policy for a person like Boris to be surprised, and in any case the Soviet Union was delighted at the outcome of the unforeseen bombing. When he re-

ceived Geoffrey's message, Boris was puzzled. Like the rest of the world, he hadn't yet heard that Christopher and Arlette were involved.

"This bombing—" Geoffrey began when Boris phoned him.

"A very neat little operation, I thought," said Boris in his faultless English.

"Very neat." Geoffrey kept his voice low, but venomous. "You know, of course, that my son was killed? And my wife is in the hospital?"

"My dear fellow, I am desolated," said Boris, truthfully. He hoped that Arlette had honored the pact that, while each knew of the other's involvement, neither husband nor wife ever disclosed to each other the exact details of an operation. "I presume," he went on, "that your wife was in the vicinity quite by chance and was naturally interested to see such an—an eminent figure in the flesh. What has happened is a tragedy. But this is war, Arthur"—Arthur was Geoffrey's pseudonym as an agent—"and you cannot fight a war without casualties. Nobody wishes to kill innocent civilians, let alone those sympathetic to us, but if you consider, there were only two deaths other than the one desired. You will agree?"

"Of course I agree with the figures. But my son—"

Boris cut him short. "Have you visited the hospital yet?"

"No."

"That is good. Before you do so, we should have a talk, and not over the telephone. Be there in half an hour. I shall be waiting."

Geoffrey was almost as perturbed by this instruction as by the death of his son. He had only ever met Boris once face to face, in the early days of his recruitment, and the "no meeting" rule was fundamental. Only in a real crisis would use be made of the so-called safe house.

The safe house was a small, expensive, and little-frequented art gallery on P Street. It was run by a slightly eccentric and very wealthy girl, who was, in fact, another of the clever professor's college converts. The gallery did a small amount of legitimate business, but most people considered that the proprietress only kept it open as a hobby. It had a listed telephone number, of course, but the unlisted number which Geoffrey had dialed belonged to a second telephone in the back room. A small collection of elegantly displayed pictures and prints were hung in the gallery, visible from the street—but many more were stored in the room at the back.

The setup was excellent for the occasional, undesirable, but in-

evitable meeting. Anybody might stroll into a P Street art gallery, and anybody might ask to see more pictures in the back room. Nevertheless, when Geoffrey had identified himself to the girl by a code-word and was ushered through the door to the back of the gallery, he found Boris leafing through a portfolio of engravings in a state of some agitation.

Geoffrey picked up a similar portfolio and stood beside Boris. Had there been anybody there to see them, which of course there was not, they were simply a couple of art collectors deciding on their purchases.

Rapidly and quietly, Boris said, "We have no more than five minutes. After what happened this morning, I may have been followed, although I do not think so. In any case, in five minutes I shall leave. You will leave ten minutes after me, having made a purchase."

"O.K.," said Geoffrey.

"Now listen to me. Your son was a war casualty, no more, no less. A better fate than growing up to die in another Vietnam, I am sure you will agree. I must say that I am disappointed in you. You are brave enough when there is no risk to yourself or your family, but as soon as you find yourself in the front line, as it were, you apparently panic."

"I—" Geoffrey began.

"Listen, don't talk. I believe in your integrity, and when you have recovered from the initial shock I believe you will continue to be useful. The question is—Natalie." Natalie was Arlette's code name.

"What about her?"

"Women are sentimental about children. She is of very little practical use to us at the moment, and she could become a serious danger if she turned against us."

"Was she there on your instructions, Boris?"

"Of course not. Do you think we are mad? Now it is entirely up to you to convince her to remain loyal. Use the arguments I have outlined. And remember, my friend, that the first person she would betray would be you. I shall await your report."

Boris pulled out an engraving, retied the tapes, and returned the portfolio to the shelf.

"Are you threatening her?" said Geoffrey.

"She is threatening all of us unless you do as I say," said Boris, and walked back into the gallery.

Ten minutes later, Geoffrey emerged into the street, walked several blocks, and then hailed a cab to take him to the hospital . . .

Arlette had been given a private room and the nurse informed Geoffrey that she would have to stay at least one night. She was suffering, said the nurse, not so much from her physical injuries, which were slight, as from shock at her son's death. There had been no question of breaking it to her gently. She had actually seen it happen and had never lost consciousness.

"And she could be sure he was dead?"

The nurse hesitated, then said, "Yes, Mr. Browning. I'm afraid she could."

She paused, her hand on the knob of Arlette's door. Softly, she added, "She's under sedation, but—well, please be very gentle with her."

It was fortunate that Arlette was to some extent sedated, otherwise she would probably have attacked Geoffrey physically as soon as he came into the room. As it was, she could only mutter, but with venom. "Get out of my sight. It's all your fault. You got me into this."

This was quite untrue, but Geoffrey wasn't prepared to argue the point.

He pulled a chair up to the bedside, sat down, and said softly, "Darling, don't you think I feel just as bad as you do? But Chris was a casualty of war. That's how you must think of it. In wars, innocent people get killed. It's tragic but inevitable. In Vietnam—"

Arlette rolled over onto her side to face the wall, away from her husband. She murmured, "Go away."

"All right, darling. I know what you're going through—don't think I don't. But by tomorrow—"

"Go away!" It was the nearest thing to a scream that Arlette could manage. Geoffrey went.

Arlette came home the next day to a flood of condolences, to the ordeal of the funeral, which she insisted on attending against her doctor's advice, and to Geoffrey. In public, she played the part of one half of an inconsolable couple, clinging together for comfort. She did it very well—after all, she had been playing a part for years. In private, she would not speak to her husband, nor allow him to touch her.

It was a week after the funeral that Geoffrey said, after a dinner eaten in icy silence, "Look here, Arlette, we've got to talk this thing out."

"Very well." They were the first words she had spoken to him in private since his visit to the hospital. "Go ahead. Talk."

Geoffrey said, "I told you the day it happened, but you weren't in any state to take it in. —Of course, I understand that."

"Told me what?"

"That Christopher—and you—were war casualties. If you believe in the cause you're fighting for, you accept the fact that some people are going to get hurt." Arlette said nothing. Geoffrey went on, "Think of all the other mothers who have lost their children—in Russia, in Vietnam. They accepted it and bore it bravely because they were fighting for something they cared deeply about."

"I don't think I'm so crazy about war now," said Arlette, quite gently. "Not now that I've seen it."

"But evil has to be fought. The forces of Fascism—"

"Did you know," said Arlette, "that it was Boris who sent me to Blair House that day? To get some photographs."

Geoffrey's reaction was instantaneous. "I don't believe it!"

"Why shouldn't you believe it?"

Geoffrey hesitated. He did not want to say, "Because Boris himself told me." In any case, he was prohibited from mentioning the meeting at the safe house, even to Arlette. Then he remembered Boris's answer to his same question.

"Do you think he's mad?" he demanded. "He'd never have risked the life of an important agent."

"I can prove it," said Arlette, still quietly.

She's bluffing, Geoffrey thought. Aloud he said, in a conciliatory voice, "Well, then, it must have been an administrative mixup. Boris would never have sent you deliberately if he had known—"

"I see. So now Christopher didn't die as a war hero but as the result of an administrative mixup. I'm telling you, Geoff, I've had enough of it. I'm no use to Boris any more, and I never intend to be. You can tell him to remove my name from the rolls."

In some desperation, Geoffrey said, "Look, Arlette darling, do what you like, it's your life, but please don't take it out on me and on our marriage. After all, we're both young. We can have another child."

Arlette stood up. She said, "I wouldn't want to bring a child into the sort of world that you and Boris are trying to create. Good night, Geoffrey."

She walked out of the dining room and up to the spare bedroom where she now slept.

It was then that Geoffrey knew for certain that she was going to betray him. How and when? Well, it would be extremely difficult for her to pin anything on him at the moment. She would wait for

her chance, and the next time he got an assignment from Boris—After all, she knew the codes. She knew altogether too much. And if he, Geoffrey, were also to become useless to Boris he had no illusions about how he would be dealt with.

With the foreknowledge of her betrayal, Geoffrey began to hate Arlette, to see her as a menace to himself and to the world that he was fighting for. So a few days later Geoffrey and Boris met again, at a different venue. A safe house, having once been used for a meeting, is not used a second time. This was a setup much like the other, but in a different part of town, and the front was a shop selling rare books.

Geoffrey said, "I had to see you. I've done everything I can, but she's adamant. She won't work for us any more."

"That's no great loss," remarked Boris. He was smoking a cigar and thumbing through the pages of a rare first edition.

"It's worse than that," Geoffrey said. "She's going to blow us all sky-high as soon as she can get some definite proof. As soon as you give me another assignment, in fact."

There was quite a long silence. Then Boris said, "Do you care for her?"

"Not any more. She's become an entirely different person. A stranger."

"You've accepted your son's death?"

"Yes, I have. And I'm ashamed of his mother. I don't care what happens to her."

"Ah," said Boris. "Very good. I believe you. You have answered questions which I had not yet put to you." Another pause. "Is she planning any traveling in the near future?"

"We're flying up to New York on Sunday, on the shuttle. It's her mother's birthday and the family is expected to gather—that is, Arlette and her two sisters and all the husbands. I don't know how I'll be able to sit through it."

"You'll be traveling together?"

"No," said Geoffrey. "Arlette is taking the eight o'clock plane in the morning—you know they run every hour. She and her sisters always prepare the birthday lunch for their mother, so she has to be there early. I told her I was damned if I was going to get up at all hours just to hang around that mausoleum with the gruesome old lady and my brothers-in-law, who are both Fascist millionaires. I said I'd be there for lunch at one."

"Excellent," said Boris. "then you will simply wait until your wife

has left on the eight o'clock plane, then you will board the nine o'clock. There is no need to book ahead, as you know."

"But—"

"This will give you about three hours in New York, during which you will make contact with a member of our United Nations delegation I am anxious you should meet. Three anonymous hours are very useful. You will receive your instructions."

Geoffrey went to bed early on Saturday night, leaving Arlette watching television. Much as he now hated her, it wasn't a very comfortable feeling to sit in the same room with a person for whose imminent death he would be indirectly responsible. Boris had said nothing definite—he never did—but it was obvious that something was going to happen to the eight A.M. shuttle plane between Washington and New York the following morning. Geoffrey hoped that not too many innocents would die this time. Fortunately, few people tended to use the early-morning planes over the weekend. Only after he was in bed did he realize he had left his jacket hanging over a chairback in the livingroom. He couldn't face going down again to get it, and actually there was nothing in it—just an innocent wallet with credit cards and enough money for his trip. Nothing to interest Arlette.

Next morning, still half asleep, he heard Arlette moving about the house. His watch read just after half past six. Well, she had always been a fiend for punctuality. It was her lookout when she got up.

The alarm clock by Geoffrey's bed went off at half past seven. Arlette had long since left for the airport. He made himself coffee, packed a canvas bag with overnight gear (which included some microfilm New York wanted to see), picked up his jacket from the living room, and started shutting up the house.

Unlike Arlette, Geoffrey always liked to catch planes and trains with no hurry but with no more than a few minutes to spare. National Airport was only a few minutes' drive. However, having had some difficulty in parking the car, he found it was already five to nine when he arrived. He almost had to run in order to get his ticket, but there were few people about and the plane was far from full. The departure of his flight number was called just as the desk clerk was stamping his ticket. He boarded without even putting his change into his wallet.

The aircraft took off beautifully—a smooth, lazy soaring into the

sunny October sky. Geoffrey settled himself in his seat, pulled out his wallet, and opened it to put in the change. As he did so, he noticed a small envelope that hadn't been there before but was of a type he recognized. He opened it. It contained small photographic prints of the West German statesman and his group leaving Blair House. He remembered that Arlette had claimed to have proof she had been sent there by Boris. Last night, after he had gone to bed, she must have slipped this proof into his wallet. So Boris had lied to him.

His musings were cut short by the jolly voice of the pilot, booming through the loudspeakers. "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome aboard. We hope that you enjoy your flight to LaGuardia Airport, New York. The time is now five minutes past eight, and we should arrive at eight-forty-five."

Eight? Geoffrey consulted his watch. It was five past nine. Oh, well—people made these mistakes.

"I hope," the pilot continued with a chuckle, "that all you folks remembered to put your clocks back last night. Yes, winter's on the way but the weather bureau assures us we can expect the same beautiful fall weather for a few—"

For a moment, Geoffrey sat there, numb. The three faces of betrayal rose before his eyes—Arlette, Boris, and the apparently innocent face of the watch he had trusted since his college graduation. Then he came to life, tore open his seatbelt, and struggled to his feet.

A hostess approached. "Is something wrong, sir? Please refasten your seatbelt. The captain hasn't yet—"

Geoffrey shouted, "Take me to the captain! This plane has a bomb on board! We've got to turn back at once!"

The hostess had been trained to be unflappable. "If you'll just sit down, sir, and refasten your seatbelt I'll tell the Captain—"

Geoffrey pushed her aside. "I'll tell the captain!" he yelled. "There's a bomb on board and I know who planted it! I'll tell on the whole rotten lot if he'll turn back now!"

The hostess shrugged as Geoffrey ran up the aisle toward the cockpit. "The captain will deal with him," she told the other passengers. "Luckily it's only a forty-minute—"

Before Geoffrey reached the cockpit the bomb went off. There were no survivors.

Arlette went straight to the authorities. Boris, whom she iden-

tified as he was leaving the embassy, had diplomatic status and could only be expelled from the United States as *persona non grata*. He went back to the Soviet Union, to whatever fate his compatriots had in store for failures. The college professor, however, turned out upon investigation to be a Russian who had been smuggled into the States as a very young man. He was sentenced to forty years in prison. However, he is expected to be exchanged quite soon for an American caught spying by the Soviets. And so it goes on.



DETECTIVERSE

NEVER SAY DIE

by FRANCES AMSTERDAM

(with apologies to Oliver Goldsmith)

When lovely woman stoops to murder,
And finds, too late, that clues betray,
What art can swiftly serve to gird her
For the limelit courtroom fray?

The simple frock, the trembling smile,
Are tested methods—who can doubt it?
And then, to make it all worthwhile,
She can write a book about it!

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a **NEW** short story by

GEORGE BAXT

*None of the scientific or humane societies seemed to have any use
for Dame Laura Winfield's spleen . . .*

A neat, nutty tour de force from George Baxt . . .

THE VULTURE WITHIN

by GEORGE BAXT

Temple-on-Thames
Surrey, England
11th June, 19—

My dearest Eric:
If you are reading this letter, then I am dead. I have been murdered. You must order an autopsy of my body immediately, before it is given over to the scientific and humane societies who have rightful claim to the various sections of my anatomy—heart, liver, eyes, etc. No one seemed to have any use for either my gall bladder or my spleen.

If for some strange reason there was a delay in this letter reaching you and I have already been subdivided, you must instantly request to borrow back my, for want of a better word, legacies, and have them thoroughly tested by the medical examiner. I may be wrong, but I think not.

You see, if I survived a certain breakfast, then this letter would not have been delivered. So I repeat (as I frequently do in my novels to hammer home a point I insist needs hammering regardless of my editor's advice)—if you are reading this letter, I am dead. A murder most foul, to quote the bard who can never be overquoted.

To explain thoroughly, I must go back thirty-five years to when I "adopted" Amanda. You will soon understand why there are quo-

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tation marks around *adopted*. The year before (you were a mere lad of six years or so at the time) was the time I mysteriously disappeared for six months. This disappearance was as scandalous as Agatha's back in the Twenties, and though it was not explained by Dame Agatha in her autobiography, there are those of us in the mystery-writing fraternity who have our suspicions. Dorothy Sayers confided to me shortly before she died that she suspected there was more to Agatha's apple-munching than a delaying tactic while awaiting inspiration. I myself, as you know, chew licorice, which is perfectly harmless other than for staining my teeth. However, let us get back to my disappearance.

Actually, I disappeared to Egypt at Agatha's suggestion. She knew the country well and arranged for me to travel with an upper-class group of Bedouins who had isolated themselves from the society of other wandering Arabs. Their leader, Abou Ben Khadim, was particularly remote from everyone. Agatha, in referring to him, charmingly said, "Nomad is an island."

I stayed with the Bedouins until the birth of my daughter. That's right, Amanda is my rightful child. Adopting her was a piece of hoodwink arranged by your father, who swore never to reveal my secret—not even on his deathbed, when he turned his law practice over to you, my dear Eric.

There were several reasons why I could not admit to being Amanda's rightful mother. There was my husband, Monty, a stick-in-the-mud who viewed extramarital activities with a jaundiced eye. He died without learning the truth. Amanda's true father was killed in an automobile crash in France. He was of royal heritage, an absolute cad and bounder—redundant, I know, but the emphasis becomes him. The best that can be said of his memory is that he sat a horse well.

I know, I know what you're thinking. When Amanda reached maturity, why didn't I tell her the truth? Well, damn it, I'd just been made a Dame of the Empire and what Dame Commander admits to an illegitimate child?

Well, you know that for thirty-five years, Amanda has been quite a handful. I mean, until she settled down on the chicken farm last year I spent every day despairing for her well being. The fast cars, the fast men, the drinking, the fly-by-night marriages. (Who in one lifetime commits herself to a draper's assistant, a doctor who faints at the sight of blood, and a piccolo player with a deviated septum?)

What an unpretty penny they all cost me and how amazed I am that I survived all the disasters she perpetrated!

And your beloved father, what hell we put him through! Law suit after law suit and how brilliantly he handled them! Yes, darling Eric, you too are brilliant, but on another level. Haven't I retained your services after your father's death even through that awful situation when everyone thought you were trying to steal from my trust accounts?

To get back to Amanda, you remember how startled and pleased I was that dismal Sunday afternoon when she came back to the mansion to tell me she had made up her mind to settle down and mend her ways. You and your beloved Edna had driven out for lunch and I remember Edna saying to Amanda over the trifle, "Amanda, don't you think it was time you settled down?" How calmly Amanda took her suggestion—although I still wonder had she not finished her trifle, would the remains have settled over Edna's well appointed coiffure? Edna is always so immaculate . . .

"A chicken ranch," Amanda announced, giving the impression she might have just invented the wheel, "I've come across a chicken ranch for sale just a few miles from here. It's ever so quaint, Mother darling! Think of it, we could be neighbors!" After I stopped shuddering, I quite calmly asked her what made her think she could manage a chicken ranch when she was totally incapable of managing her three husbands, a set of roosters if ever I saw one.

Surprisingly, Amanda did not pout. She always loved the outdoors and working with her hands, and the people who owned the ranch—actually, as you know, it's a modest little farm—had offered to teach her all there was to know about cultivating chickens, harvesting and marketing their eggs, killing, eviscerating, packaging, and marketing the chickens. And really, Eric, we have to admit, after the first six months she became remarkably adept at chicken farming.

And yes, Eric, you have been marvelously supportive, encouraging and cheering her until she had the ranch—farm—if not on a paying basis, at least holding its own. But Eric, my dear, I long suspected there was a dark side to this chicken-farming venture. I think the enterprise eagerly entered upon by Amanda was a blind for a very delicate, very dangerous amorous adventure. I suspect Amanda is having an affair with a married man.

I know what you're thinking. Like mother, like daughter. *Is* there such a thing as the sins of the mothers? I don't know, Eric, nor do

I know the identity of this person—but whoever it is, he is after the money Amanda will inherit after my death.

Now we get to the core of my story. A few weeks ago, Amanda came galloping up the path to the mansion, her hair flying, her crop urging Tornado onward. She leapt out of the saddle like the heroine of a western film and came hurrying into the sitting room where I was awaiting tea. I was working on the last chapter of *The Vulture Within* and terribly dissatisfied with it when Amanda came tearing in, shouting, "Mummy, Mummy, something wonderful is happening!"

I, trying to be jocular, asked, "Your chickens are laying square eggs."

"Oh, *Mummy*," said Amanda with a look of reproach, "humor has never been your strong point."

I let that pass without for one moment entertaining the thought of cutting her out of my will. "Well then, my dear," I said as McCauley entered wheeling the tea cart, both it and his joints creaking, "tell what the something wonderful is that is happening."

I suppose the one asset Amanda has inherited from me is the art of keeping one in suspense. She wouldn't share her joyful news until after McCauley had made an arthritic retreat. Then "Mother," she began. Mother, not Mummy. I continued pouring. "I am a writer," she said. I sloshed tea all over the table.

"A writer of what?" I asked, soaking up the spill with a napkin.

"Murder mysteries! Just like you!"

"When did all this start?" I asked, wishing the blood would stop rushing to my cheeks. A writer indeed!

"Three days ago!" She was so excited, her hand trembled as it reached for her cup of tea. "While I was cleaning hen house number two, I began thinking of numerous ways of murder."

"Why?"

"Because of *you*, darling. I thought it would be fun to try to think the way *you* think. Like when you're stuffing yourself with licorice and humming 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen' and we know you're bogged down."

"Licorice is very bad for me," I sighed. "Doctor Appleby pleads with me to rid myself of the habit. It aggravates my diabetic condition."

"Exactly! Your diabetic condition! I found myself thinking, Supposing someone wanted to kill Mummy. How would they go about it?"

You must believe me, Eric, I tried to be helpful. "There are many ways," I told her. She looked like a child, she leaned forward so eagerly, an almost obscene look of hunger on her face. "I could be knifed, shot, drowned in my bathtub, poisoned, hit by a lorry . . . Or have you come up with something airily esoteric?"

"I haven't come up with anything! I just thought to myself, Here is my mother, Dame Laura Winfield, the greatest living writer of murder mysteries in the world. Supposing someone murdered Dame Laura Winfield—and Dame Laura *herself* provided the murderer with the scenario for the crime!" She leaned back, crossed her legs, and propped her chin with the palm of her right hand—awaiting, I supposed, a round of applause.

"I'm supposed to provide the murderer with the means for murdering *me*?"

"The perfect crime!"

"Why perfect?"

"The murderer must not be caught."

I felt myself getting restless. "How much of this have you written?"

"Oh, I've made oodles of notes."

"Oodles of notes can sometimes be a writer's undoing." I remember then looking at my wristwatch. It was time for an insulin injection. I excused myself and went to my room. I gave myself the injection and then reclined on the bed. I needed time to think. What madness was possessing Amanda? Did she really take me for a complete fool? Amanda a writer? What utter nonsense. *Amanda was planning to murder me.*

I heard her calling from the hallway, "Mummy, are you all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine, dear," I shouted back, "I'll be right down. Ring for McCauley and tell him to bring a fresh pot of tea. The other must be tepid."

I went to my dressing table and sat and studied my face in the mirror. I thought I was looking quite well for an old campaigner of seventy-five years—a bit pale, of course, and the eyes a bit runny and the nose a bit pinkish at the tip, but that's how I reacted to the insulin.

The truth, Eric, is that I was amused. You see, my dear, even as I write this letter I have but a short time to live. Doctor Appleby will confirm this, as will the autopsy. And as I said earlier, unless this letter has been delivered to you upon my sudden death, you will be no wiser as to the sad state of my health. Appleby has promised

I will not suffer and I have signed a Living Will which you had bloody well honor when the time comes.

But perhaps the time has come now. Perhaps Amanda has been sent to spare me the ordeal of a slow death.

"Mummy!"

"Coming, my darling!"

When I returned to the sitting room, McCauley had already replenished the tea and Amanda was pouring. "Does the insulin make you feel a bit dickey?"

"One has to be cautious not to overdose, darling."

"What would happen if you overdosed?"

I took the fresh cup of tea from her with an amazingly steady hand. "I would sink into a coma. I would die if the coma wasn't recognized as such and the doctor sent for immediately."

"It would be a painless death, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, very painless." And then I pulled myself together with a great shout of joy. "*There's* your modus operandi! *That's* how to murder me! An overdose of insulin!"

Amanda was all starry eyed. "It really works?"

"Yes, it really does. But there's the problem of how to administer the overdose."

"Why, with a hypodermic needle, of course."

"Oh, no, no, *no*, darling. Would you expect me to sit still while you attempted to pounce on me with a hypodermic loaded with an overdose of insulin? I may be in my seventies, but I'm still a very strong woman. I'd knock you to the ground and shout for help. Now let's put on our thinking caps." McCauley appeared in the doorway, clearing his throat to gain my attention. "What is it, McCauley?"

"Begging your pardon, Dame Laura, but the grocer's assistant is at the back door. I've given him your list and I wondered if you might have any last-minute additions."

"Let me see, McCauley. I really can't think of anything. Since you loathe eggs, all we need are a few for me and Miss Amanda will supply us with those."

As McCauley left, inspiration struck. Here it was. The final test for Amanda. I could tell her how to kill me. It was so beautifully obvious. I did.

"Would it really work, Mummy?"

"There's only one way to find out."

She burst out laughing. "Oh, Mummy, don't make it sound so real.

This is only for a story. You don't mind my trying my hand at writing, do you?"

"Darling Amanda, I am delighted at any attempts you wish to make to improve yourself. By the way, do you mind much not having a man in your life?"

She gave me a strange look. "If there was one, you'd know about it."

"Of course, dear."

She excused herself and left me alone. I suppose she went to spend a penny. Then, after what seemed ages, she finally came back and her face seemed abnormally flushed. "What's wrong, dear?" I asked.

"Nothing's wrong, Mother. But I'd better get back and put my chickadees to bed." She kissed me lightly on the cheek and said, "I haven't forgotten about the eggs. I'll bring some back later this evening."

I watched her mount her horse and gallop away, then hurried upstairs to my suite.

In the bathroom, it was apparent Amanda had gone through my medicine chest looking for insulin. A vial was missing. She had also found my box of hypodermic needles. The lid was slightly askew. It certainly looked as though Amanda was going through with it.

Later that night, as promised, she returned with the eggs. Two eggs, to be precise.

"I'll bring more in the morning," said Amanda. "These two were freshly laid and I wanted you to have them while they're still warm." After some meaningless small talk, she left and I went to my study to compose this letter.

It's almost two in the morning now, and time for bed. I shall leave the eggs in the kitchen with a note to McCauley that they're to be boiled for my breakfast. And that if I survive breakfast you are not to see this letter.

You see, Eric, Amanda has injected the eggs with insulin. I give myself a shot first thing in the morning. The eggs will be the overdose. Therefore, the need for an autopsy. I must admit, on the one hand, I hope she has killed me because I am tired, and very sick, and this evening I completed *The Vulture Within*, devising a new ending that has just come to me. On the other hand, I hate my darling to be a murderer and brought to trial. I leave this to you, Eric, and to your trusted judgment and forgive me for doing this.

Your devoted friend,
Laura Winfield, D.B.E.

Amanda stared across the desk at Eric. He sat in his chair, framed against a window and the setting sun beyond like some emperor of a newly discovered country. "There's no outsmarting her, is there?" said Amanda huskily.

"Oh, yes there is," said Eric as he reached for his desk lighter and set fire to Dame Laura Winfield's ultimate sheets of prose. Dropping the blazing pages into a large ashtray, he got up from his chair, crossed around the table to Amanda, helped her to her feet, and kissed her passionately. "Now we must think what to do about Edna."

"There's more than just your wife to worry about," said Amanda.

"What do you mean?"

"There's *The Vulture Within*."

"What about it—other than the fact that being her last book it will sell a packet?" He rubbed his hands together greedily.

"Mother's editor phoned me this morning. He's asked me to lunch tomorrow. He says there's something strange about the alterations she made to the last chapter. He says it needs to be discussed only between him and me—for the time being."

"That sounds rather mysterious."

Amanda was applying a match to a cigarette. She inhaled and then exhaled a perfect smoke ring. "He's given me a clue. It seems there's something about someone dying of a murderous overdose of insulin." She exhaled another smoke ring. "Mother always had to have the last word."



a **NEW** short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

"So we have motivations galore," Lucien Lacombe said in summation. He leafed through his notebook as he spoke.

"Keep your eye on Lang Bews," Tim Power said. "All he's guilty of is fingering everybody else . . ."

THE JUDGMENT OF LANGSDORF BEWS

by **WILLIAM BANKIER**

It usually took Lang Bews fifteen minutes to walk from his room at the Central YMCA to Scarpino's Restaurant. Today he did it in ten because he was late and he hated to miss any part of the Charlie Henshaw morning show. The single by the window was unoccupied. Bews slipped in and ordered his regular breakfast just as Henshaw's theme music began playing.

"And it's me again," the laconic voice intoned. "Charlie Henshaw, Montreal's mid-morning man speaking to you from a cardboard studio in the foyer of Scarpino's. There's your plug, Luigi, now get off my back. Seriously, ladies—and you men recently made redundant—all is well at this restaurant. The health inspector has decided to give our chef, Pat Dobie, one more chance to wash his hands. No, really seriously, the notorious Dobie will be along in a few minutes to prepare and serve something he calls a scrambled-egg mountain. And I, fool that I am, have agreed to eat it. But before the condemned man takes his poisonous breakfast—"

Bews accepted delivery of grapefruit juice, oatmeal, toast, jam, and coffee, and began putting it away. As he ate and the radio program flowed over him, soothing as a tropical tide, Bews told

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himself how fortunate he was. A boy from Baytown with no great talent, here he sat amid sophisticated surroundings, good food in front of him, money in his pocket.

Best of all, he knew Charlie Henshaw. He actually worked for the same employer. Not that the public would ever recognize Lang Bews the way they did Henshaw. Bews was the lowest of the low at CFTP. Not even a commercial writer, he was the man who churned out all the boring promotion announcements. "Tonight at 9:30, don't miss your weekend sports roundup with Miles Cuffler—" That sort of thing. The announcements had to be written, dozens of them every day, and he wrote them.

With two extra coffees, Bews extended his breakfast to occupy the full hour of Henshaw's program. The final minutes were allocated to an exchange of mock-abuse with Pat Dobie. The chef was looking *cordons bleu* in his tall white hat, white tunic, and white kerchief knotted round his neck. Henshaw, by contrast, was laid back in tailored denim, gold-framed Polaroid specs, and a red borsalino resting brim up on his prematurely grey hair.

"You got away with it today, Dobie," he said. The scrambled-egg mountain had been a triumph. "Can you manage it two days in a row?"

"Sounds like what the actress said to the bishop." The chef was able to take care of himself in these dialogues with Henshaw.

"Answer the question."

"I'm preparing a little surprise for you."

"Thanks for the warning, I'll get somebody else to take over." Henshaw's constantly roving eye fell on Lang in the window seat. "I'll send in my colleague, you can poison him. There he sits, my working buddy, creator of repetitive radio announcements since Marconi's bar-mitzvah, the one and only Langsdorf Bews. Let's hear it for Langsdorf."

Bews glowed as staff and customers responded with a spattering of applause. He sensed that Henshaw was making fun of him again, that the reference was in fact insulting, but he suppressed his annoyance as he had done so often in the past. Charlie Henshaw had mentioned his name over the air. How many boys from Baytown could match that?

At the end of a stainless-steel counter displaying cheesecakes with cherry and blueberry toppings, Luigi Scarpino was dressed in a tight blue pinstripe suit, his face glistening from a too-close shave with a straight razor, his hair corrugated like the roof on a munitions

shed. At eleven in the morning, Scarpino looked as if he had just come from or was going to a banquet. "C'mere, Charlie," he whispered as Henshaw approached Bews.

"Hello, Lu."

"Where were you on Sunday afternoon?"

"Sorry about that, Lu. I tried to phone you."

"My daughter's wedding, you creep. I told everybody you were going to be there. The famous Charlie Henshaw was going to handle the entertainment. You made me look stupid."

"Something came up. I'm sorry. I'll make it up to you."

"My only daughter. I told everybody you'd be there."

"Listen, I have to go, Lu. See you later."

"You see *me*, Henshaw, you better cross the street."

Bews caught up to Henshaw at the cash desk. The announcer was not required to pay—anything he ate or drank came gratis—but the cashier moved from behind the desk to cut him off. She was a dark, attractive woman with something of the farm girl about her that couldn't be disguised under the smartly cut silk-jersey dress she was wearing.

"Is Luigi mad at you, Charlie?"

"I'm afraid so, Monique. I missed his daughter's party. Well, what can he do, have me killed?"

They stood well apart, like strangers waiting to be introduced.

"I wouldn't like him to look at me like that."

"Nobody looks at you like that."

"Take care of yourself." She extended a hand and touched his wrist with one fingertip. "We don't want anything to happen to our Charlie."

As he left the restaurant, Bews saw Monique Dobie's husband Pat staring at them from behind the deli counter. Then he went back to slicing pastrami.

Suffering from morning thirst, the radio men walked to the Stanley Tavern. "How do you manage your working hours?" Henshaw said when the beer was on the table. "Have you discovered where Tim Power buried the body?"

"I get on well with Mr. Power."

"You get on well with everybody," Henshaw said accusingly.

"When I show up doesn't matter as long as the work gets done. Sometimes I stay late." There was never any incentive for Bews to

return to the spartan cubicle on the tenth floor of the central Y. "Anyway," he added, "I like to watch you do your program."

"Langsdorf, Langsdorf," Henshaw scolded, but he wasn't displeased. "Tell me again where that name came from."

"The captain of a German pocket battleship called the *Graf Spee*. Otto Langsdorf. My mother used to talk about him. She said if there'd been more like him around thousands of people might not have died in the last war."

"He's the one who sank his ship."

"In the mouth of the River Plate, between Uruguay and Argentina. He'd been involved in a sea battle with three destroyers, *Ajax*, *Exeter*, and *Achilles*. To make repairs, he put in to Montevideo, a neutral harbor. When he was told he'd have to leave, he knew a lot of British sailors were going to get killed and most of his own crew as well."

"So he copped out."

"Not really. Langsdorf saw his men safely interned. Then he steamed out to where he wouldn't block the shipping lanes and scuttled the *Graf Spee*. After that, he came back and shot himself. In his hotel room."

"So your mother called you Langsdorf." Henshaw peered out at his companion under the brim of his red hat. "That sure is a hell of a thing to do to a boy named Bews."

Bews had learned that if he didn't respond to Henshaw's needling, the attack would die for want of fuel. Then the man could become easygoing, almost affectionate.

Two beers later, Henshaw was saying: "I had to get out." They had gone on to the story of his childhood in a crowded house in the poor district of Verdun. "There were fourteen of us in five rooms. That isn't counting the three who died. My father thought—I don't know what my father thought. All I know is what he did. He kept my mother pregnant most of the time. She was fifty-six when she died and she looked eighty-five."

"Good Lord."

"I blame her too. Why didn't she argue? Why didn't she ever say she wanted a life?"

After a high-speed drive up Côte-des-Neiges, Bews and Henshaw arrived at the studios of CFTP. The building, once the property of a film company, had been designed decades ago in the optimistic belief that Montreal would have its own motion-picture industry.

From the outside it looked like an airplane hangar. Inside, apart from the huge main hall, it had been partitioned into a warren of corridors, stairways, and isolated offices.

Tim Power met the late arrivals as they passed through the reception area. He had nothing to say to Lang Bews—Bews was not his problem. He headed Henshaw off and said: "Contract time, Charlie. Let's talk contract."

"I don't see the point," Henshaw said. "It's a question of who wants me most. The other station is being very persuasive."

"Give me a chance, Charlie. Your whole history is with CFTP." The owner stood beneath one of the pinpoint spotlights in the ceiling, his rimless glasses gleaming, his yellow hair, trimmed daily, shining like a halo.

"I'll think about it, Tim. But don't count on me after September when the old contract dies." Henshaw winked at Bews and walked on towards the stairs.

Power called after him: "You're putting me in a very difficult position!"

As they approached the first-floor landing, Henshaw expressed his business philosophy. "Twist them into the ground, Langsdorf," he said, "as far as they'll go. Then if they lift their heads, use your boot to press them down."

"You'll never leave CFTP, will you, Charlie? You'll die here."

"Probably. But it wouldn't pay me to admit that to Tim Power."

Lola Clarke was standing in the doorway of the room where the copywriters worked. She waited patiently, like a hit man with a rich contract. When Henshaw reached the landing, she drew herself up in her neat green-velvet suit, tugging the cuffs down over bony wrists. Some women did things with rinses to combat grey hair. Lola Clarke let nature have its way. "All right," she said aloud when Henshaw veered her way.

"What gives, Lola?" he complained. "Lost your stopwatch? That so-called one-minute spot you gave me to read for Lisbon Motors went sixty-seven seconds. Are you getting a payoff from the client?"

"That's the way, Charlie. Go on the attack so you can avoid facing your own misdemeanor."

"What misdemeanor is that?" Henshaw asked.

"I heard you on the air last night. So did my family and friends and thousands of others. Your gratuitous slur wasn't appreciated."

"You mean your novel? I gave it a plug in prime time."

"Thanks for nothing. Your snide remarks hurt."

"Not guilty. I'm proud of you, Lola. How many radio-station writers have a book on the market?"

"You're a needler, Henshaw. A cowardly one at that. You put the boot in whenever you get the chance. I haven't figured out why and I don't much care. It seems to me you aren't a proper human being."

Henshaw spread his hands in an exaggerated appeal. "If you cut me I'll bleed."

"Don't tempt me," Lola said as she went back inside her office and closed the door.

"I seem to be in trouble," Henshaw said.

"She'll get over it," Bews commented.

"I'm not so sure." There was no anxiety in Henshaw's eyes, only smug amusement. "What should I do, Langsdorf? The destroyers are waiting. Shall I take the ship out and scuttle it?"

Henshaw and Bews parted company, the promotion writer heading up a narrow flight of steps to his backwater office. It was the least desirable location in the building but Lang felt comfortable in it. His schedules were tacked to a corkboard panel along with a couple of postcards of Baytown in the 1930s and a snapshot of his mother taken on a trip home two years ago. She stood beside hollihocks in the back garden, wild white hair brushed back from a broad forehead, eyes unafraid. According to his recollection, this woman had never said a destructive word—except for the times she cursed out his father in blood-red sentences.

"Have you seen Charlie Henshaw?" Miles Cuffler, the sports broadcaster, loomed in the doorway, blocking the aperture with beefy shoulders and a neckless head.

Bews went ahead with taking a package of sandwiches from his briefcase and putting it in the drawer. "I saw him earlier."

"Where?"

"In Scarpino's. Doing his show." That was the part of the truth Bews felt like telling.

Cuffler radiated outrage. "If I want ancient history I can go to the library." He turned and clomped down the steps in his imported boots.

Cuffler's animosity was justified. Henshaw had done him two bad turns; he had refused to lend the sports announcer a thousand dollars and, worse, he had spread it around the station that Miles was on

the verge of bankruptcy. Charlie would be his own worst enemy, Bews reflected, if it wasn't for a lot of other people around here.

For the next hour and a half, he worked steadily, composing promotion announcements according to a formula that was routine. "The habits of seaside creatures are explored tonight in the first of a new series. Don't miss *Tidewater Tales*, tonight at eight on CFTP."

It was later than usual when Bews decided to go upstairs for his lunch and his nap. He gathered up his sandwiches and a tin of Coke and left the office. It was customary for him to hide for an hour in the middle of the day. The glass-roofed conservatory at the top of the building wasn't much used by the staff. An occasional soirée took place there when somebody left the company and out came the wine and the obscene tape-recordings. Bews enjoyed the parties. But equally he liked getting away and eating his peanut butter on whole-wheat and then, when his eyelids became heavy, stretching out on one of the upholstered benches and drifting for an hour.

Today Bews found the door closed. He rapped once, then turned the handle, and stepped inside. The place felt hot and there was a sweetish smell in the air. As he moved forward, his shoe skidded. Somebody had spilled something on the floor. He looked down. It was blood.

There was nothing to keep all that blood from flowing out of the slash in Charlie Henshaw's throat and no use in finding something. Bews stood back and observed the body of his friend. Oh, come on, he said to himself, I had so many things I wanted to say to you.

Reticence, he realized then, is a mild form of suicide.

"Sit over there, please," Detective-Sergeant Lucien Lacombe said. "There may be something else." Bews took a seat.

"Now you, Mr. Dobie," Lacombe went on. Pat Dobie came forward and sat down. Out of his whites and into a beautifully tailored black corduroy suit, he looked like a dance instructor. "What were you doing so far from Scarpino's today?"

"Mr. Power can tell you." Dobie indicated the station manager, watching from a stool beside the sound-effects console.

"I want you to tell me." Lacombe's manner was patient, low-key. A heavy moustache failed to disguise the fact that he was still a young man.

"Mr. Power asked me to cater his anniversary party. We were talking about what I should do."

"Wouldn't he discuss that with Scarpino?"

"I'm handling it freelance, the restaurant has nothing to do with it. I may work for myself someday."

"He's telling the truth, Sergeant. I asked him to come and see me."

"That's okay." Lacombe tested the spikiness of his moustache with a fingertip. "Can you tell me anything about the murder of Charlie Henshaw?"

"I only know what everybody's saying. He was killed upstairs sometime this afternoon. His throat was cut. You haven't found the knife."

"You were close to Henshaw."

"I saw him whenever he did his show from the restaurant."

"You were on the program frequently as a guest."

"Yes. But we weren't close."

"These appearances were good for you."

"They were good for Scarpino's restaurant."

"Come on, Dobie," Tim Power said sharply, "Henshaw was making you a star. Montreal knows your name because of the morning show."

Lucien Lacombe looked thoughtful. "Did Henshaw pay you for these appearances?"

"No. Well, he'd *give* me something once in a while—a bottle of whisky, tickets for me and my wife to go to a show."

The reference to Dobie's wife rang a bell with Bews. In his testimony, he had forgotten the fingertip contact that morning between Monique Dobie and Charlie Henshaw by the cash desk. Never mind, Lacombe had more tangible things to go on.

"So we have motives galore," the detective said in summation. He leafed through his notebook as he spoke. "Mr. Power was unhappy with Henshaw for threatening to move to the rival station."

"I wouldn't have to kill him," Power said. "CFTP created Charlie Henshaw, we can do the same for somebody else."

"Lola Clarke was mad at him," Lacombe went on, "for saying bad things about her book on the air. Miles Cuffler was steamed because Henshaw refused to lend him money, then spread it around that Cuffler is broke."

"Keep your eye on Lang Bews," the station manager said. "All he's guilty of is fingering everybody else."

"Don't forget Lu Scarpino," Dobie said. "I heard him tearing into

Henshaw for missing his daughter's wedding. Scarpino doesn't like being stood up."

By the time of the anniversary celebration, the Henshaw murder seemed almost forgotten. Less than a month had passed but no arrest had been made. Lacombe was busy with other cases. Lang Bews arrived early at his boss's cottage, poured himself a large one, and carried his glass to a corner. Here he drank and watched Jessica Power making new arrivals feel at home.

Bews knew little about Tim Power's background but he suspected his success had something to do with marrying Jessica. She looked like money. Her chestnut hair was cut a sensible length, parted and held by a clip, and it shone from frequent shampooing. It was always the same—never any mad experiments with new lengths or tints or perms to change her image. Jessica was what she was.

"Lang, look at you in your private place." She came to him with both hands extended. "Don't get up, I'm just flitting by. Are you well?"

"Happy anniversary."

"Incredible, isn't it. I can't believe twenty-seven years." Pale-blue eyes gave him her complete attention. "There's marvelous food on the way. Pat Dobie has been monopolizing the kitchen since four o'clock."

"I haven't eaten in two days." A lamp threw light on Jessica and Bews noticed a parchment texture beneath her eyes. "Are we getting some piano later?" he asked. "Is Tim going to play?"

"I think you can depend on it."

The buffet was a triumph. There was everything from lobster thermidor to cherries jubilee with several Dobie specialties nobody had seen before. The chef was a nervous presence, adding a dollop of sauce to an incomplete plate, topping up a hesitant portion of salad. Close to midnight, the host sat down at the baby grand and ran his fingers over the keyboard. There were sounds of approval and a general movement into the big room. Tim Power was a talented pianist. Years ago, in his twenties, he had made a few dollars playing with a band. Then he married Jessica and his career took a more practical turn.

Lola Clarke moved dramatically to the curve of the piano, lifted her champagne glass for silence, raised her eyebrows at Power, and before you could say Della Reese they were into a torchy performance of "After You've Gone." Bews thought it sounded rehearsed.

When the song ended, Miles Cuffler seized Lola and slung her over his shoulder like a sack of wheat. She struggled until he put her down. That might have been the end of the roughhouse had Cuffler not gone too far. As Lola turned from him and tried to regain her dignity, the sports announcer swung a hand and whacked her on the buttock. The unmistakable sound of tightly packed elasticized fabric made everybody laugh.

Lola's face went white, her eyes glassy with tears. "Cuffler, you're a pig!"

He put his hands on her, preparing to draw her to him for a parody kiss. She broke away, fell back against the buffet table, her hand seeking and finding a broad-bladed knife used to carve the Virginia ham. "Touch me again!" she said. "Just touch me again!"

The situation needed saving. Tim Power struck a major chord, announced, "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home!" and the party was back in business.

Bews sang along whenever he knew the words. Then, when Power closed the piano and the tapes came on and people started dancing, he retreated to the bar. There were a lot of women at the party, bright-eyed with alcohol and eager to show how good they could look on the floor. In this climate, even Bews would do for a partner so he made himself unavailable by becoming unsteady on his feet.

Leaving the upstairs bathroom sometime later, Bews realized how sleepy he was. But he wasn't ready to go home, he liked hanging on at parties. A short rest in an out-of-the-way place would set him up for another few hours.

He lurched down a corridor, saw a door ajar, moved inside, and made out the shape of a bed in the dark. He fell forward onto it, his momentum carrying him over the other side and onto the floor. Never mind, the carpet was deep and soft—and his eyes were heavy.

"Monique? Is that you, Monique? What took you so long to answer the phone?"

Bews awoke and recognized the voice of Pat Dobie. Raising his head in the darkness, he confirmed that it was indeed the chef silhouetted in the doorway, using a telephone on a dressing table. Bews sank back to a supine position and listened.

"You were supposed to pick me up at one o'clock, I've got all this gear to carry. I don't want to call a taxi, I want you to do what you're supposed to do." Dobie listened, then he broke in. "Somebody's with you. I heard somebody. Don't lie to me, damn you, who is it? Have

you got Scarpino there?" He waited. "If I'm paranoid, it's because of the way you behave, you devious slut!"

Waves of ferocity emanated from the man in the doorway. If there had been any other way out of the room, a window, a chute, a trapdoor, Bews would have fled for his life.

"Shut up, Monique—listen to me. I know it's Scarpino. I've been watching the pair of you. I'm not afraid of him and his gangster friends. I took care of Henshaw, didn't I? And I'll do the same to Scarpino." The telephone shrilled abuse. "The police? You'd better not. Or I'll do you before I do him. Now get in the car and come and get me."

Pat Dobie slammed down the phone and left the room. Bews lay on his back with his eyes closed, trembling. He was going to have to call Lucien Lacombe and report this conversation. They would arrest Dobie and put him away forever. Dobie would pay for his crime, as Henshaw had paid with his life for being irresponsible.

But what about Monique, who tempted men and provoked her husband? And Luigi Scarpino, who was apparently not above having an affair with the wife of his head chef? Everybody seemed to be guilty of something. Could he blow the whistle on Dobie? That remained to be seen, but he couldn't sit in judgment on any of them.

Bews began to drift, the floor moving gently beneath him like the sea. Enemy ships were waiting in the estuary. The New Zealand and British sailors were decent men, as were his German sailors. Something would have to be done to avert the slaughter and only Langsdorf could do it. Feeling cold, he took hold of the edges of the flag he was lying on and drew the fabric about him. He was confused and frightened.

But when he was poked awake hours later by an irritated Tim Power, who obviously wanted to go to bed, the dream evaporated and Langsdorf Bews was dragged back abruptly into the real world.

"If you don't mind," his host said, "the party's over and my wife and I would like to call it a day."

Bews got up, hearing distant guns, knowing the battle would have to continue. "I've found out who killed Charlie Henshaw," he said.

"Q"

YOU WON'T BELIEVE YOUR EYES WHEN YOU READ

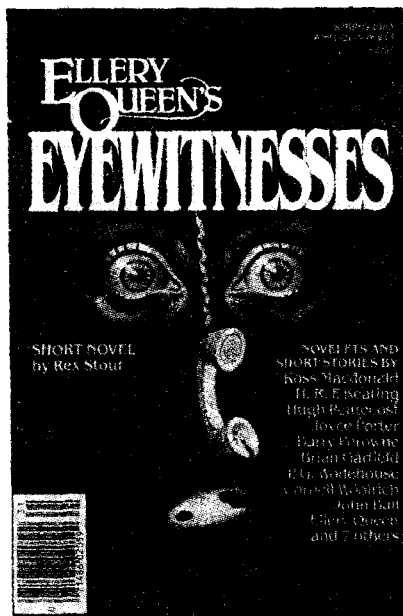
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Think before you act. Always cover yourself. And never trust anyone . . .

THE THREE BASICS

by GARY ALEXANDER

Selkirk shut the door to his inner office. Outside was his boiler-room operation, the type he had described to Markham when they were cell mates at Flagford State Prison. A dozen salesmen were hunched over telephones at two large tables, nailed-up plywood partitions separating them. The noise was deafening.

"Quite a deal," Markham said, visibly impressed.

Wade Selkirk presented the quick, sharklike smile Markham knew well. A ruddy man with a five-hundred-dollar suit and sculptured hair, observed Lonnie Markham—looks like he's doing dandy for himself. But he had coasted in the pen too. He reminded Markham of a television preacher.

"Oh, I'm getting by," Selkirk said. "But it's getting tricky. When I had that little problem, the Securities and Exchange Commission pulled my ticket, so this's the closest I'll ever get to the stock-brokerage business yet.

"The trouble is I've already moved three times this year, and one of these days some folks will be barging in with badges clipped to their J.C. Penney sports jackets and it'll be all she wrote. That's why I asked you over, Lonnie. I need you to deliver something to a business associate in Seattle and bring something back for me. That package will afford me a nice cushion and I think you'll be happy with your fee."

Lonnie Markham was a thin, pallid man in his twenties. He had a soft face without facets and the stooped demeanor of one who had been taken behind the woodshed once too often. He had been released from Flagford only three weeks ago. Selkirk's phone call had been a shock.

"Is it legal?"

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Wade Selkirk chuckled. "Of course not. If it were, I'd send it by United Parcel."

Markham shook his head. "I don't know. I don't want to go back."

"Hey, who does?" Selkirk said expansively. "I've got all the angles covered. I did time too, you know."

"Sure. Eighteen months on a seven to ten. That don't exactly make you the Birdman of Alcatraz."

"Remember when we were together, Lonnie, before they built the new wing and transferred me?"

"Yeah, sure. You had the guards and the wise guys in your pocket, had it made. And I do appreciate how you took care of me."

"Specifically, Lonnie, me teaching you the Three Basics of Life."

Markham nodded. "Think before you act. Always cover yourself. Never trust anyone."

"Go to the head of the class, Lonnie. Those tenets are in force on this assignment. That's why you have nothing to worry about."

Lonnie Markham needed time to think. He changed the subject. "By the way, what're you selling here?"

"Nickel. Nickel is very hot right now. New mines exploiting the world's largest deposits in Northern Ontario. Get in on the ground floor, boys and girls!"

"Really?"

Selkirk sighed. "No, Lonnie. I don't even know where Ontario is. For all I know, there's nothing up there but polar bears. That's why I need your help. This scam is running out of time."

Lonnie Markham studied his shoelaces, shook his head. "I don't know."

"Hey, what else do you have going?"

"Well, my parole officer got me my job at the furniture factory." Markham glanced at his second-hand Timex. "I put together metal desks and stuff like that, and I'm on my lunch hour now."

"You're earning what, Lonnie?"

"Minimum wage, but I got an increase coming pretty soon."

Selkirk read Markham's defensive mood. "Hey, I'm not knocking it, just offering an option. Let's go. I'll run you back to work."

Wade Selkirk's Seville purred effortlessly out of the parking garage. Its dashboard was a Christmas tree of digital gauges. Seven years ago, when Markham began his sentence, such features did not exist.

"You like?"

"Sure do," Markham said. The car smelled new, and the stereo had him in the center of an orchestra.

Selkirk handed Markham an envelope and told him to open it. Inside was an airline ticket to Seattle, a key, and a thick stack of currency.

"When you return, take the long green to your friendly neighborhood Caddy dealer. It'll make a down payment and then some."

"You didn't say nothing about killing anybody."

Selkirk laughed. "It's as I said, Lonnie. Today's Friday. Go in the morning, catch a hop Sunday. Nobody'll be the wiser. And you'll get a nice break from our smog."

Markham was weakening. "Would this be connected to your bust?"

"Indirectly," Selkirk said. "If you'll recall, a few hundred shares of Ma Bell common in a client's account became misplaced, but that's all they got me on. There were some bearer bonds too, but nothing they could pin me on. Some Treasury, some corporate, a few from one account, a few from another, and so on. And none of them *mine*. I'd go in late and talk sweetly to the computer.

"Bearer bonds, Lonnie, are almost as liquid as cash if you know someone who can change serial numbers and market them. My associate in Seattle is such a person. They are of very large denominations, very compact to carry."

"Well, who's this associate of yours?" Markham asked.

"A fellow incarcerated, if that's a correct term. You don't know him. We met after I was transferred to the new wing. A genius with soybean futures. He could talk a flea off a junkyard hound. How about it, guy?"

"How come you don't go yourself?"

"Obligations, Lonnie. And certain parties regarding those bearer bonds remain nastily suspicious. That key fits a locker at the airport. There are personal papers in there and other unimportant things. You're to be concerned only with the package with an X on it. Yes or no?"

Markham said nothing. They were nearing a dreary industrial area and the furniture factory.

Wade Selkirk gave him a slip of paper. "A phone number in Seattle. Call and say you have a box of cookies from Aunt Susie. Transfer arrangements will be made, bonds for cash."

"Cute," Markham muttered.

"Lonnie," Selkirk said impatiently, "I have to receive a commitment from you now or find somebody else."

"Yeah, I know."

"What was it, Lonnie, armed robbery? A rather comical caper, if memory serves me."

Comical to everyone but Lonnie Markham. He'd cased the Exxon station and it had looked like a cinch. The owner, a scrawny old coot, was on by himself in the evenings. The Texaco attendant the week before, a strapping young guy, had nearly fainted when Lonnie stuck the Saturday Night Special in his face.

But the Exxon man merely blinked and frowned. That was the last Markham remembered until he woke up in a police car with his hands cuffed behind him.

"Good morning, Princess," said one officer. "Enjoy your slumber?"

"Bad choice," said the other. "You picked on Iron Mike O'Casey. Used to be a welterweight contender until he retired and went into the gas-station business. They say he had a quicker left hook than Kid Gavilan."

The furniture factory came into view. "This is so tacky, Lonnie. Please don't be discouraged about prior failures. That was before you met me and learned the—"

"Yeah, the Three Basics of Life. Stop and turn around. I'll call in sick from the airport. They won't suspect a thing."

Markham got a room at a motel near Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. He figured an extra night would give him time to sort it out, to decide whether it was worth the risk. Instead, he got drunk in the motel bar and somehow managed to make it to his room before throwing up and passing out. It was past noon the next day before he was in any condition to make the phone call.

Think before you act. Always cover yourself. Never trust anyone. So Lonnie had a couple of beers for breakfast and took a bus three miles to a phone booth.

"I got a box of cookies from Aunt Susie."

"Marvelous," said the voice. "Where are you now?" The voice sounded vaguely familiar.

"I'm somewhere in town."

"Indeed. Everyone has to be somewhere. Name a time and place."

"It's got to be public, with a lot of people around."

"Wade didn't say he was sending up a paranoid. I'll save you the inconvenience and meet you now, wherever you choose."

"Where's the most public place we can meet?"

"Today? Now?"

Markham's courage was leaving him. "Nah, let's make it tomorrow."

"I've got it," the man said. "The Hawks entertain Denver tomorrow. I have fifty-yard-line seats. We'll meet at the Kingdome."

"Huh?"

"Professional football, man. My God, did you just arrive from another planet?"

"Sort of," Markham said.

The man gave Lonnie a seat number. "We'll do what we have to do, then enjoy the ball game. Buy a souvenir seat cushion—the good kind with a zipper. Replace the padding with the, uh, cookies. We'll exchange cushions. After the game, you take it to Aunt Susie. She'll be most appreciative."

"Lots of people there, huh?"

"Sixty-four thousand screaming faithful. *Ciao.*"

At Flagford Markham had watched televised pro football in the day room. He'd seen the new domed stadiums. Before he was sent up, there was only the Astrodome. Now every city seemed to have one. He'd missed a lot of progress.

This structure was massive, a dome of gray concrete. He arrived early to check things out. He located the section, aisle, and seat number, then stayed outside on the ramp as spectators entered.

There was a familiar face in the throng. It took a while, but he finally matched the face to a name: Arthur Haven. He'd seen him around at Flagford, but since Haven was in the new wing they'd never met. He remembered Haven because when he saw him at Flagford he was with Wade Selkirk. Haven was also doing easy time. He was an attorney and accountant who did work on the outside for some real hardnoses.

Markham waited until a moment before kickoff before going in. Sure enough, Haven was seated next to his number. A man on the other side of the vacant seat had a red face and a huge neck. He wasn't talking to Haven, but there was no way Markham could be certain they weren't together.

Think before you act. Always cover yourself. Never trust anyone. Markham sucked air to the floor of his chest, wiped perspiring hands on his jeans, and sat down next to the lean graying man with the nifty tan and a suit that must have cost as much as Wade Selkirk's. "Good to see you," he told Markham with a handshake and a sincere smile. "Wade speaks highly of you."

"Uh, thanks."

"The cookies, I assume, are of the quantity and condition in which you accepted them."

"I guess so. I didn't mess with the package."

Haven patted Markham's knee. "Good, good. Let's see how the home team does. The playoffs are on the line today."

Haven's cheer dissipated midway through the second quarter. Denver was up 21-3 and a Seattle running back had just fumbled. "Shall we make the exchange now?" he asked. "If the momentum doesn't shift by halftime I'll probably forego the finish. Who, after all, enjoys atrocities?"

After the switch was made, Markham knew, he had no guarantees. His stomach didn't feel all that good and he hoped he wouldn't get sick. He didn't reply, didn't move. He stared out at a game he didn't see.

"Wade warned me you were somewhat indecisive," Arthur Haven said. He leaned over, cocking his head. "Johnny?" He was speaking to the man at Markham's left. Red face, no neck. Markham had sized him up at close range, decided that maybe the guy'd got himself caught in a time machine, starting from where he'd been banging dinosaurs over the head with a club. His eyes were still straight ahead, but he'd pushed something hard against Markham's ribs.

"If you will, Mr. Markham, raise up and I'll remove the cushion. Then you and Johnny will walk out for hot dogs and beer."

The Three Basics of Life. Basic Number One. Markham hated doing it, but while watching football in the Flagford day room he'd seen fans make complete asses of themselves by dressing funny and leading cheers in the stands. They did it for attention. They got it too.

Markham jumped up, twisting to face the people behind him. Waving his arms, he began screaming, "Defense! Dee-fense! DEE-FENSE!"

Sure enough, a couple of hundred or so joined in. "DEE-FENSE!"

Johnny, however, had a firm grip on Markham's sweatshirt. He'd put his gun away, but his red face was turning purple. And this wouldn't last forever, Markham knew—these things petered out real fast. He had to make his move. Johnny's meaty hand had him locked in place. He was getting out of his seat too.

Markham then discovered the Fourth Basic of Life: Luck. The crowd leaped up, erupting with joy. A man directly behind Johnny,

drunk, Markham assumed, lurched forward and knocked Johnny slightly off-balance as he was rising, causing him to let loose of Markham. Markham gave Johnny a shove and he toppled ahead into what he later learned was a group of police officers with discounted season tickets.

Markham fought through to the aisle, clutching his cushion. He was no football expert, but the sight of a Seahawk cornerback racing down a sideline with an intercepted Denver pass was pretty obvious. Arthur Haven's disappointment was obvious too. He hadn't budged and a hand was covering his eyes.

If anyone was happier than Lonnie Markham, it was the cabbie he'd left outside with a hundred dollars. The cabbie's meter kept running all the way to Portland, two hundred miles south. It didn't spoil his day, either, when Markham paid the fare at Portland International Airport and kicked in a fifty-dollar tip.

Markham got change and called Wade Selkirk. He told Wade what had happened.

"I'm sorry, Lonnie," Selkirk said, "I had no idea Artie would be so devious. Come on home and we'll try another tack."

"No way," Markham said.

"Hey, where are you? I'll come and pick you up, even if I have to charter a plane."

Nobody would be searching for him in Portland, Markham knew. Haven's men would be scouring Seattle airports, train stations, and bus terminals. "That's *okay*, Wade. I can handle it."

"Of course you can. Bring those bonds and we'll—"

"There was only a million. In those other packages and stuff in that locker you said I shouldn't bother about, I found three million more. If Haven'd been an honest guy I'd probably still have my neck in a sling. What you were doing was a trial run. You had to find out if Haven was a straight-shooter or not, even if *you* weren't. —Lonnie loses both ways."

"You have to realize, Lonnie, that the possibility of a technical error—"

"If you've got an extra key for that locker, Wade, don't waste the gas in that Cad. All you're gonna find in it is dust." Markham hung up and walked to the nearest ticket counter. The next outgoing flight on their board was to Philadelphia. Markham had never been there, but it was at the opposite end of the country. What the hell. Why not?

He paid, checked his luggage, and went to the boarding lounge. One thing you could say for Flagford, they had what they called a rehabilitation program. Markham, a seventh-grade dropout, had been taught to read and write.

They had also given him lessons on how to use the library. Those bearer bonds, pieces of paper that were supposed to be just like money—well, it didn't make much sense how they could be, but the cash Wade had given him for expenses would tide him over until he read up on them and made some contacts. Then he'd hit the street and see what he could do. Keeping in mind, of course, the Three Basics of Life. And hope like hell for the Fourth.

"Q"

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The power he held in his hand should be used for something better than ripping up his brain . . .

A story about power and a different kind of entrapment from the dark side of Robert Twohy . . .

A NEW FEELING

by **ROBERT TWOHY**

I'm fifty-seven years old and last week learned I have lung cancer. No surprise. I've been a smoker since the mid-thirties. I've been lucky to date—last week's date. Now I'm unlucky. —Not really, though. Like that creep in the ad says, "Pay me now, or pay me later." What's the difference? Not much. Some more highballs, some more TV junkstuff, a few more tries to be a big shot with a woman, ending with the usual letdown. A few laughs maybe—the hell with it. Let it go, g'bye all.

One thing I won't do—suffer. I'm not good at that. I won't be carved on and fed radium or whatever they do. I have cancer and though the doctor didn't say I'm terminal his tone did. But he's wrong. I won't die of it. I'll die of a bullet in the mouth.

Robinson has a gun. When he had that all-night catering truck out at the maintenance shops at the airport he got beat up and robbed one night and then got the gun—a .22—and cartridges. Then his truck went kaputsky and he went back on the cabs, driving days. The gun's in his closet, he's showed it to me. But last time was six months ago so he's more or less forgotten it. He doesn't have any possessions worth anybody breaking in for and he has no use for a gun any more, but he still has it as far as I know.

Getting it should be easy. He's out during the day. I'll go over to

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his dump and climb the stairs. His door will be locked but I know how to fiddle with the knob, jamming it and pulling it as I turn it counter-clockwise. In a little while the lock'll give way . . .

So now I'm in my lousy little room with the .22 and the box of cartridges, and I've filled the chambers. So the gun's ready and I guess I am.

How do I feel? Not bad—pretty good actually. I've shaved and showered and my grey slacks and good blue jacket are back from the cleaners and I've got on a blue shirt and a very stylish tie I got from Goodwill this morning for the occasion. It's probably out of date but it looks fine with the shirt and jacket. My brown shoes are down at the heel but I've put a shine on them and over all I look about as sharp as I have since my wedding day, thirty-five years ago.

The mirror shows lots of sags and creases, but a good head of grey hair and a smile that makes me glad I spent \$550 for top-of-the-line dentures instead of \$350 for the cheapo, which was ten years ago and the cheapos would be in sad condition by now. A few times in my life I've broken down and spent a buck instead of going steerage and I've always been glad when I did. So I'm looking as good as I can, and when I smile there's still a little of the old roguish charm left, maybe.

I sit down, thinking, What the hell's with you? You planning suicide or a date for the junior prom?

I heft the gun. It feels solid and all business.

I can see how it is with a young guy when he hefts a gun. He's different, he's been transformed—he's the strongest person alive. Stronger than Larry Holmes or Arnold Shnazzleberger or whatever his name is. Unless those guys carry a gun too, which if they do, the young guy is no worse than equal. He's not scared any more. He can say, Give me this, give me that, and if anyone laughs he just shows the gun and they stop laughing—bet on it. They listen, and if it's really not him they're listening to but the gun, so what? The guy is the gun, and the gun is him, and that's the feeling when you heft it.

I flip the safety off, put the cold end in my mouth, lay a little pressure on the trigger, and think, Big deal. It'll tear my brain apart in one second or less and so what? What's been done? I'm dying anyway and never did anything useful when I was healthy. I taught history for a while and had three kids not seen in umpteen years. They've forgotten me and why not—I've forgotten them. I got di-

forced and drove a cab and knew some women and had some laughs and lots of drinks, smoking like a demonstrator for the cancer industry the whole time and finally falling a casualty—and when the pellet from this cold, slim weapon tears through this brain material I'm gone and what a waste of power.

Power like I hold in my hand should be used for something better than ripping my brain up.

So I've thought—and I'm thinking. I've taken the SP up from my town to San Francisco, twenty miles, and now I'm walking a street, and it's dark. I look sprightly in new-cleaned clothes. Goodwill carries some top lines—a wealthy man dies and his widow donates his wardrobe. So for a few bucks you get quality sometimes, in prime condition sometimes. My jacket and slacks are prime. From the ankles up I'm executive suite.

From the ankles down, from the rear, I look like someone too shiftless or who can't afford to have new heels put on. But on a dark street at night, who's noticing?

It's about nine. This is a terrible street. You can smell it. Dead beer and dead hopes and dead other things—and fear and hate and craziness, if those things have a smell, which they don't, but you imagine they do. You see faces, passing and in doorways, looking at you. What they see is a guy in good clothes with a pleasant expression, which is more or less my normal expression exaggerated a little, and they think, Tourist! From some burg in Nebraska or Georgia or someplace. On his way to a convention or a meeting or a date, and he's got mixed up on directions and is ambling along, his hands in his pockets, like he's on Main Street back home—a pure pigeon. And someone's going to take him soon if he don't flag a cab and get out of here with what he's got, including his health. (My walk doesn't show I'm dying.)

But another thought runs counter to that—which is, This guy is too raw to be real. Even a hick from the most behind town in the country would have seen the first block that this is no area to stroll, nighttime or notime. But he keeps on coming. So he must be a decoy—back there in the mish-mosh of routine dreck on the sidewalk behind him must be cops in dreck clothes. The word's come down—make some arrests, let the tourists know The City Is Looking After Them.

As all local pols know, image and not reality is what a tourist city lives by.

I walked to the end of the shops. Ahead are moldering apartment buildings, nobody on the sidewalks, just cars passing. I'll get hit on before the night is over, and it will likely be on one of those dark unpopulated sidewalks rather than in a block of lighted shops. Of course, night stalkers don't have to follow set rules so you never know.

I can start with this first dark block and just dawdle around this way and that and soon or eventually draw a response—that's as sure as what the doctor told me last week. The .22 is a solid weight in my right pants pocket. My hand is around it and I'll have no second thoughts about using it. I'll pull it and blast some young punk or some pro or he'll blast me, which will be that g'bye.

So why am I slowing down?

It has to do with the power thing again—the power in the gun and in me, the power that maybe should be used for more than luring some two-bit bad guy into a shootout, with maybe me the winner. What good was it to clean up one little scrap of garbage with tons of it drifting around in the streets?

The bartender is bringing me a second beer. This is a stinking dump full of pathetic and degenerate types who are looking at me, but I'm ignoring them. The beer stinks but I'm drinking it anyway, thinking, For the first time in your life you're in a position of power—not only because you have a gun but because you're dying. So what are you going to do? Try to nail a mugger? Is that all? Can't you think bigger than that?

Why should I have to? What do I owe the world, society, America, the City and County of San Francisco, the tourist industry, God, my ex-wife, my ex-children, my own dreams of childhood, of right, wrong, decency, justice? Nothing. I owe nothing. To no one. What makes me think I should do something useful, or meaningful, or unusual, or picturesque, or adorable, or anything, with the power I have in my pocket, fed by my diseased lung?

Because I have it, I guess. That's the only thing I can focus on—because I have it, and feel it ought to be used.

I went off into a beerdream.

If Hitler was alive and this was 1936, I could catch a freighter and soon be on a street in Berlin, or Nuremberg, standing in a crowd. And when he came by in an open car with his hand shoved out in that salute and everyone with their hand shoved out calling "Heil, Führer!" I'd shove mine out and put a bullet in his ear. Think of all

the millions of lives that would have got lived with him in a crypt with a .22 cartridge in his ear. What a way to use my power!

Instead I was planning to walk a mangy street in San Francisco and have a showdown with a punk or a failure pro, whose night would be made if he hit a tourist for a big score, \$100 or maybe more . . .

I ask the freak behind the bar for another beer. The power I have is more than the power of Von Stauffenberg. Von Stauffenberg was the rooster who planted the briefcase with the bomb in it under the table that almost blew Hitler away in 1944. If Von Stauffenberg had had the power I have right now he wouldn't have fixed on a bomb that could blow in the wrong direction, he'd have pulled a .22 from his briefcase and put it in Hitler's ear and that would have been that.

But he didn't because he wanted to go on living—not be cut down five seconds after shooting Hitler. So he slid the briefcase under the table and said, Excuse me, I got to see a man about a dog, and split. And the bomb was near the leg of the table and blew the wrong way. Hitler got his clothes just about blasted off but lived to watch films of Von Stauffenberg hanging on a meat-hook. Von Stauffenberg didn't accomplish what he could have because he lacked the power I have—the knowledge that I've got a fatally diseased lung.

But it's not 1936 and Hitler's dead. And I don't know any politician or any other big shot I can say in clear certainty is an evil person and that the power I have, if turned on him or her, will make my otherwise completely pointless life worth having been lived. There are plenty of lousy politicians, crooked ones, and phony ones, but none I *know* of as *evil*.

So what should I do with my power? Forget the Gary Cooper shootout with the mangy little bad guy as just delayed sophomorphism and take the next train back home and stick the gun in my mouth and blow myself away?

No, I can't do that. Because the power's been given me, in a sense. It's meant to be used. That's crystal-clear to me now. I put down my third beer and head out into the street for the dark block beyond. I no longer have to know the whos and whys and whereafters.

The power is to be used. That's all I know. It's not for me to decide who or why or when. Somebody will come. And I'll shoot him. Or he'll shoot me. Or we'll shoot each other.

There's a guy. He's under those stairs. Really crummy-looking—and

he's looking at me, he's gearing himself up. He has big shiny eyes. Scared eyes. He's jumping out! What has he got? A gun? A knife? It shines.

In front of me, his voice squeaks—something about stuff. "Hand over your stuff," something like that. Scared voice, half starved-looking. His first job, maybe. Desperate, maybe.

He's dropping. He looks up at me. He can't believe it.

His look changes. He's stopped looking. He's signed off. It's a gun on the ground by his hand. Maybe a cap gun. Who knows?—it doesn't matter now.

I move on. Not fast. Here and there there's a shape at a window. Nobody's come out a door. The sidewalk's empty ahead. Some cars have gone by. They haven't slowed though the kid is sprawled under a streetlight.

It's still not late. I have six bullets in the .22.

A man with a .22 who's dying, who's into a fantasy, is dangerous. Stay clear of him.

I've never been dangerous before. It's a new feeling. I'm the strongest man alive.



POE - TIC CORNER

BAD MAN'S BALLAD

by AUBREY DAVIDSON

I've learned all my lessons the hard way
As I've wandered from pillar to post—
Sailed an opium cargo by moonlight
All the way down the Barbary coast.
I've known all the gunmen in 'Frisco,
Smuggled hooch into Drago's saloon,
And the Golden Gates don't seem so golden
When the world gives you no silver spoon.

And if I had really a mind to,
I swear I could tell you a tale.
There are many more rogues on the sidewalks
Than ever I met with in jail.

I've done a short stretch at San Quentin,
I've seen the inside of Sing Sing:
But the crime that a man's put inside for —
I can tell you it don't mean a thing.
I've known felons in all shapes and sizes,
The old, middle-aged, and the young;
But in ninety-nine cases per hundred,
The real villain never gets hung.

There ain't proper words to describe 'em,
If I tried it I'd certainly fail.
There are many more rogues on the sidewalks
Than ever I met with in jail.

I once formed a link in the chain gang
When life was all horrors and fears,
And the razzmatazz of old Alcatraz
Was a part of my earliest years.

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I've known what it is to be sworn at,
I've suffered the whip and the blow,
But when it comes down to real Justice
Then Society don't want to know.

For I was the man sent to prison,
When my partners were let out on bail,
So I know there are rogues on the sidewalks
Who ought to be with me in jail.



THE END

by THOMAS P. HANRATTY

Deep in the cellar
So cold and so gray
Where spiders spin death
In their silky-soft way,
Where diminutive sounds
Warn diminutive ears,
Where a smother of dust
Lies asleep through the years,
There's a corner as loathsomely
Dank as a cave
With a fresh stretch of concrete
The size of a grave.

© 1983 by Thomas P. Hanratty.

POE-TIC CORNER
DOUBLE IDENTITY

by *BETTY JOCHMANS*

A doctor named Jekyll and Hyde
 Was a bigamist, no one denied.
 He married and then
 He married again,
 " 'Cause I'm really *two* people!" he cried.

© 1983 by Betty Jochmans.

"Q"

FALL RIVER FOLLIES

by *J. C. HONEYCUTT*

Said Emma, "Land sakes, Sister Lizzie,
 You certainly are in a tizzy!
 If Pa saw that hatchet,
 You surely would catch it—
 Which brings up the question: where is he?"

© 1983 by J. C. Honeycutt.

"Q"

HEAVENLY SOUP

by *SHARLIE FIELDS*

Her heavenly soup soon gained fame,
 As did she, that murdering dame.
 He ate it at seven,
 Was in heaven by eleven,
 And that's how the soup got its name.

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a **NEW Captain Leopold story by**

EDWARD D. HOCH

"Damn it, Fletcher," Captain Leopold grumbled, "they can make machines that translate foreign languages and do our banking and draw maps and even predict the weather. Why in hell can't they make a machine that gives us a decent cup of coffee without robbing us blind? . . ."

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD BEATS THE MACHINE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

This is truly the age of the machine, Captain Leopold reflected as he scooped the crisp new ten- and twenty-dollar bills from the metal drawer of the automatic teller. Seven o'clock in the evening and he was able to do his banking! Then he went next door to his office on the second floor of Police Headquarters and was confronted with the recalcitrant coffee machine.

"Damn it, Fletcher," he grumbled, "they can make machines that translate foreign languages and do our banking and draw maps and even predict the weather. Why in hell can't they make a machine that gives us a decent cup of coffee without robbing us blind?"

"Want me to run down to the corner coffee shop, Captain?" Lieutenant Fletcher volunteered.

Leopold gave the machine a final kick and miraculously it came to life. A cup dropped perfectly into its proper position and steaming coffee began to flow. "I guess that's all it needed," he said, removing the cup and sampling the coffee. "Didn't improve the taste much though."

He carried the coffee back to his office while Fletcher followed

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along. Both of them were working the four-to-midnight shift, a busy one during the summer months when warm weather seemed to breed more street crime and random violence. "It's been a quiet night so far," Fletcher observed, slipping into his favorite chair opposite Leopold's desk.

"Let's hope it stays that way."

"I got a postcard from Connie today. She's enjoying Hawaii."

Leopold grunted. "Someday *I'm* going to take a vacation and see all the places everyone else sees."

"You love this job too much to be away from it for—"

Fletcher was interrupted by the sudden arrival of Jason Maxwell, an assistant district attorney they rarely saw outside the Hall of Justice. "I'm sorry to interrupt, Captain Leopold, but I need a favor."

Maxwell was a young man in his early thirties, with slick black hair that looked as if he waxed it. Leopold and Fletcher knew him mainly as one of the plea-bargainers from the D.A.'s office who made their job that much harder. "What sort of favor?" Leopold asked.

"We've got something big going down. I'd like to borrow your interrogation room for about an hour."

"What's wrong with the D.A.'s office?"

Maxwell put on a pained expression. "Rusto has decided to talk. I need a private place to take his statement."

Fletcher gave a low whistle. Tommy Rusto was a small-time hood who'd been picked up following the car bombing of Vice-Mayor Mark Prior three months earlier. The D.A.'s office was convinced Rusto had planted the bomb, and they had enough circumstantial evidence to get an indictment. But what they really wanted was the name of the person who'd hired Rusto. He'd refused to make a statement until now, but apparently the scheduled start of his trial the following week had given him second thoughts.

"He's going to name names?" Leopold asked.

"Seems like it." Maxwell smoothed down his already slick hair. "Look, you understand how it is. There are too many people at my office who've got a line to City Hall. Even here there's a risk, but not as big."

"Go ahead," Leopold decided. "It's been a quiet night so far. We're not using the room."

"Thanks. May I use your phone?"

Leopold nodded toward the desk and Maxwell dialed a number at the county jail across the street. "I'm in Captain Leopold's office at headquarters. We can use the interrogation room here. Bring him

over. —Of course, with his lawyer! This thing has got to be airtight!"

When Maxwell hung up Leopold said, "If the press gets a sniff of this, you'll have reporters all over the place."

"I'm hoping they don't. I've already been on the phone to the Justice Department and we can get Rusto into their witness relocation program. Once I get the statement from him he'll be spirited away and kept under wraps until we need him for the Grand Jury. I don't think he'd be safe here, even in a cell."

"Will Justice keep him for you?"

Jason Maxwell nodded. "At the military prison on Marshall Island. No one will get to him there."

"Who's his lawyer?"

"Molly Calendar," Maxwell answered, making a face. "I'll tell you, there is one hard lady! I've been up against her in court twice and lost both times. Every time I think she's being nice to me she suckers me into some sort of trap."

"I know what you mean," Leopold agreed.

"Do me another favor, Captain? Sit in on this session with Rusto. I need all the help I can get."

"Why not videotape it? Then you won't have to worry about having witnesses present."

But the assistant D.A. shook his head. "Calendar won't go for it. She says having her client on videotape that could be played on television would be like signing his death warrant. He wouldn't be safe no matter what new identity they gave him."

Fletcher got to his feet. "Are you going to need me, Captain? I should check on the arrest reports."

"Just one thing, Fletcher—ask Ainsworth or someone to clean up the interrogation room, empty the ashtrays and dump the coffee cups."

Within minutes there was a bustle of new arrivals at the squad-room door. Leopold and Maxwell looked out to see a handcuffed prisoner being led in, closely followed by Molly Calendar. Leopold had never met Tommy Rusto before but he looked much as he had in the newspaper photos—somber and mousy, with eyes so deep-set they almost disappeared into his head. Two of the jail guards accompanied him, one on either side, and a male stenographer followed behind. Leopold steered them through the squad room to the large

interrogation room down the hall past his office. The guards were dismissed and Leopold signaled to Detective Ainsworth.

"Did you straighten things up in there?"

"Sure, Captain." Ainsworth was a slow-moving veteran Leopold had inherited from the robbery detail. He took over custody of the prisoner from the jail guards, dropped the handcuff keys into his pocket, and led Rusto to the interrogation room.

"I'll want you to guard the door," Leopold told him.

Inside the interrogation room, Molly Calendar was glancing around. "Is this the best you can do, Captain?"

"We find it quite adequate," Leopold murmured. His contacts with Molly Calendar had been few, but there wasn't a man downtown who didn't recognize her long-legged stride from a block away and perhaps dream about what it might be like to spend a night with her. Now, facing her at close range, Leopold found it difficult to summon up any sort of erotic thought. She was a cool professional, stage-directing the entire proceeding to her client's best advantage.

"Look at the woman," Maxwell muttered under his breath. "You'd think she was introducing the next Governor of the state rather than a man about to confess to murder."

Jason Maxwell grunted and seated himself across the table from Rusto. "Is your client ready to make his statement, Miss Calendar?"

"Certainly, Prosecutor."

"We plan to tape-record it and transcribe it stenographically at the same time. Is that satisfactory?"

"We objected only to videotape, for the reasons previously stated."

Maxwell nodded. "You've met Mr. Springfield, the stenographer. And I think you know Captain Leopold."

She eyed him disinterestedly. "We've met."

"Very well. Let's get on with it."

Tommy Rusto whispered something in Molly Calendar's ear. "One more thing, Prosecutor—" she said.

"I'd appreciate it if you used my name during the session."

"Very well, Mr. Maxwell. One more thing. Since we're in a well guarded room at Police Headquarters, could my client's handcuffs be removed?"

Leopold stepped to the door and opened it. "Ainsworth, do you have the key to the prisoner's cuffs?"

"They're right here, Captain."

"Come in and remove them, and then stay close."

Once the handcuffs were off, Tommy Rusto rubbed his wrists and seemed to relax a little. Jason Maxwell cleared his throat and signaled Springfield to begin transcribing. "Please tell us your name."

"Tommy Rusto. Can I have a cup of coffee?"

"What?"

"My client would like a cup of coffee," Molly Calendar said. "Is that a problem, Mr. Maxwell?"

The assistant D.A. appealed to Leopold. "Do you have any coffee?"

"I'll get it," Leopold sighed. "Sometimes the machine doesn't work too well." He stood. "How about the rest of you? Would anyone else like coffee? It's not the best in the world."

No one reacted with interest.

Ainsworth was standing by the door as Leopold emerged. "Do you have some change for the coffee machine?"

"Not a cent, Captain. I'm flat broke except for a couple of bus tokens. Got to sneak next door to the automatic teller for a withdrawal."

Leopold went over to Fletcher's office and broke a dollar bill. "How's it going, Captain?" Fletcher asked.

"We haven't even started yet," Leopold said flatly.

He dropped a quarter into the slot and then remembered to call into the interrogation room, "Cream and sugar?"

"Black," Rusto replied.

Leopold pushed the proper button and watched the cup fill to the brim. At least the thing seemed to be working now without the necessity of a kick.

He carried the paper cup of coffee in, put it at Rusto's elbow, then resumed his seat next to Maxwell. "Is that everything?" the assistant D.A. asked. Rusto nodded. "Good. Let's take it from the top. Name?"

"Tommy Rusto."

"Occupation?"

"Self-employed."

"Do you wish to make a statement about your activities on the evening of April fifth of this year?"

Rusto moistened his lips. Before he could speak, Molly Calendar interrupted. "I want the record to show that my client is making this statement as part of an agreement that the charges against him will be lowered to a single count of conspiracy to commit murder, and that in return for his testimony at the trial he will be released from prison and relocated with a new identity."

Jason Maxwell waved aside her words. "Let's hear what he has to say first. At this point I'm not even certain there will be a trial."

"Oh, there'll be one," she said. "Go on, Tommy."

Rusto reached out and raised the coffee cup to his lips. "The evening of April fifth. That was the night I placed the bomb under Mark Prior's car. I stood across the street and set it off by remote control when I saw him getting into the car."

"And who paid you to do that?"

"This coffee tastes—"

Those were the last clear words Tommy Rusto ever uttered. The paper cup still full of coffee went flying from his hand as he toppled off the chair.

Leopold moved first, thinking he was having some kind of fit. But within seconds the convulsions ceased, and the truth became horribly obvious to them all.

"He's dead!" Leopole announced.

The poison was a form of potassium cyanide—the so-called suicide pill much favored in spy novels. Except for the standard drug-overdose cases routinely encountered in any metropolitan police department, Leopold had little experience with poison. His first reaction, after the medical examiner had confirmed the cause of death, was to label it a suicide.

"It couldn't be anything else," he argued. "I got the coffee from the machine and gave it to him myself. No one touched it except Rusto."

"My client did not commit suicide," Molly Calendar insisted, hitting the table with her open palm to emphasize the point. "Why should he, when he was about to strike a deal leading to his eventual freedom?"

"He got cold feet at the last minute," Jason Maxwell suggested. "He knew if he made that statement he'd be hunted by paid hit men until the day he died. So he took the easy way out."

"Rubbish!" Molly Calendar exploded. "I know my client. He had faults, but he was no coward. He knew exactly what he was doing in making that statement and he was willing to live with it."

Leopold had a thought and summoned Ainsworth in. "What's the name on that coffee machine?" he asked him.

Ainsworth went to look. "Nevins Vending Corporation," he reported.

"Phone them and get someone over here to open the machine. The poison could have come from inside."

"It's after ten," Ainsworth reminded him.

"Call them at home if you have to. I want somebody down here."

Ainsworth's phone call brought prompt action. Within a half hour the vending company had dispatched a service man named Barker to open the coffee machine and examine it. Leopold and Fletcher peered over his shoulder as he worked. "It looks O.K. to me," he said. "Nothing clogging the tubes, and the sugar is just sugar."

"The poisoned coffee was black. No cream or sugar," Leopold said.

"Then there's no way it could have been poisoned," Barker said. He closed up the machine again, then tried a coin to show that it was operating perfectly. "I can't understand why you have trouble with this machine, Captain. It's one of our best models."

Leopold grunted.

"Need me any more?"

"No. Thanks for coming in."

When Barker had gone, Fletcher said, "I guess we're back to the suicide theory."

Leopold shook his head dubiously. "I think Molly Calendar's right. A man like Rusto wouldn't kill himself. Besides, he seemed genuinely surprised when he tasted that coffee."

"Could someone have flipped a poison capsule into his cup from across the table?"

"With all of us watching? Springfield was taking shorthand, Maxwell and I had our eyes on Rusto all the time, and Molly was probably watching him too. We'd certainly have noticed if something dropped into the cup."

"Could anyone have put poison in it while you were carrying it?"

"Impossible. No one was outside but Ainsworth and he was never close enough."

"Then we're back to the machine."

"Yeah. Look, Fletcher—suppose Tommy Rusto wasn't the intended victim. Suppose it was just chance that he got the poison. Suppose an employee of the vending company had it in for cops and decided to poison one of us—any one, it wouldn't matter who. The poison could have been put in one of that stack of cups inside the machine. The cup could drop down with the poison inside it and we wouldn't notice because it's immediately filled with coffee."

Fletcher snapped his fingers. "That guy Barker! Maybe he's got a record."

"Check him out, Fletcher. I don't really believe that's how it happened, but check him out anyway."

Leopold was supposed to go home at midnight, but at quarter to twelve he was still in his office with Jason Maxwell and Molly Calendar. Neither had shown any inclination to depart, possibly because word of Rusto's death had already brought a raft of newspaper and television reporters to the building. They were under siege, and no one was eager to fend off the barrage of questions awaiting their departure.

"They were going to build a tunnel from here to the jail once," Leopold mused. "Imagine escaping to a jail."

"It would come in handy as an escape route tonight," Maxwell agreed. He turned to face Molly Calendar. "You must know what Rusto intended to say in his statement, Molly. As his lawyer, you had to advise him on whether to make it."

"Of course I know."

"Then the killing of Rusto didn't really silence him."

She shook her head. "No. But you must know that what he told me was privileged information."

"But your client's dead!"

"And it's hearsay evidence besides," she said evenly. "No court would admit it."

Leopold leaned forward. "He actually told you the name of the person who hired him to bomb Prior's car?"

"Yes."

"If Rusto was murdered, it's more than likely that person is the killer."

"I realize that. But just try to prove it."

"The name would be a good starting point."

Jason Maxwell tugged at his necktie. "Damn it, Molly, you've got to give us the name."

"You have to realize it was a machine intrigue from the beginning. Vice-Mayor Prior was killed because he offended the political machine in this county. Specifically, he was about to reveal certain financial ties between Nick LaGooda and—" she paused just a second—"District Attorney Hope."

"My God," Maxwell whispered.

"He may be your god, but he's certainly not mine. Hope has been

the link between the political machine and organized crime for a long time. Don't act all that surprised. This isn't the first time charges have been made against him."

"Something was said during the last campaign, but I thought that was just politics. Are you trying to tell me Tommy Rusto was going to accuse Andrew Hope of—"

"Not Hope, no. He was going to finger Nick LaGooda. But the motive for the crime would surely have come out."

"So you're saying that either LaGooda or the District Attorney had a motive for keeping Rusto from talking," Leopold said.

"That's correct." Molly glanced uneasily at Maxwell. "You see why I was reluctant to go into this?"

Not too reluctant, though, Leopold decided. The part about Hope's involvement wasn't really necessary but she'd chosen to reveal it in Jason Maxwell's presence anyway. "All right," he said. "I'm going out to have a talk with Nick LaGooda. Maybe that will lure some of the press away so you two can make your escape."

He stopped at Fletcher's office but it was empty. "Do you know where the Lieutenant is?" he asked Ainsworth.

"You asked him to check on the vending-machine people, Captain."

"That's right, I did." Leopold glanced at his watch. It was five minutes before the end of the shift at midnight. "I guess it'll have to be you then, Ainsworth. I'm sorry, but I'm going out to call on Nick LaGooda and I'd feel better having someone with me."

"Sure, Captain," Ainsworth said. "You gonna bring him in?"

"Not unless he gives me trouble."

Both of them were feeling hungry and they stopped on the way for a quick hamburger. Ainsworth paid for his with a shabby five-dollar bill and waited for change. Outside, he shifted behind the wheel of the unmarked car. "You think LaGooda is behind Rusto's death? You think he got one of the vending-machine people to gimmick the coffee machine?"

"I'd like to think so," Leopold said, "because nothing else seems possible. But neither does LaGooda gimmicking the machine, if you think about it."

Nick LaGooda lived in a large house in an old but wealthy section of the city. The man who answered the door showed no sign of letting

them inside. "Mr. LaGooda has retired for the night. It's twelve-thirty."

"Police business," Leopold said. "Get him down here."

"I can't—"

"Either he talks to us here or we take him to headquarters. The choice is his."

The man mumbled something and disappeared. When he returned, he opened the door wide and ushered them into the ornate living room. Leopold barely had time to take in the spotlight paintings and oriental rugs when Nick LaGooda appeared in a royal-blue dressing gown. He was tall and almost priestly in appearance, his wavy white hair carefully in place.

"What can I do for you, Captain, at this hour of the night?"

"A friend of yours was killed a few hours ago. Tommy Rusto."

LaGooda nodded. "I heard the bulletin on the eleven o'clock news. But I hardly knew Tommy. I wouldn't call him a friend."

"Before he died, he implicated you in the killing of Vice-Mayor Prior."

Nick LaGooda snorted. "Too bad he didn't live long enough to make the accusation in a courtroom."

"May I ask where you were this evening?"

"Right here at home. With witnesses."

"Did you speak to anyone on the phone?"

"I speak to people on the phone all the time. I have a great many business interests."

"Do any of them involve Andrew Hope?"

"The D.A.? I steer clear of him."

Leopold felt himself at a frustrating dead-end. "Have you had any contact at all with Tommy Rusto since his arrest?"

"I told you, I barely knew him. I haven't had any contact with him in years. I used to see him around the old neighborhood, that's all."

"How would you describe him?"

LaGooda shrugged. "A small-time loser."

"Why so?"

"If he wasn't a loser he'd still be alive. Right?"

On the way back to headquarters Ainsworth asked, "You gonna question anyone else?"

Leopold thought about the district attorney but dismissed the thought. Not at one in the morning. "No. Drop me off and you can go home."

He found Fletcher back in his office and asked, "Find out anything?"

Fletcher shook his head. "Barker seems clean. A shoplifting arrest when he was eighteen, but the charge was dismissed. Nothing in the last ten years. He's the one who services our machine, so he's the only one who could have tampered with it."

"Ainsworth and I went out to call on Nick LaGooda."

"Yeah? Did he break down and confess?"

"What do you think?"

"I think I want a cup of coffee. How about you?"

"Did the lab boys finish with the machine?"

"Yes, but what could they do? Everyone in the squad room has their prints on it, and we still don't know that the poison was in the machine."

"Where else could it have been?" Leopold asked, following Fletcher out to the machine.

"I was thinking maybe we should listen to the tape and review the stenographic notes Springfield made. We might find something." He dropped a quarter in the slot and pushed the button for coffee with cream and sugar. Nothing happened. "Damn!" Fletcher whacked the machine with the heel of his hand. Still nothing happened.

Leopold squatted down to inspect the tube through which the coffee filled the cups. It seemed clear of any obstruction. "I can't see what the trouble is."

"The cup didn't even drop down. The coin must be stuck somewhere."

Leopold agreed. He gave the machine a kick, as he had earlier in the day, and suddenly the cup appeared and the coffee began to flow into it.

"I wouldn't mind all this trouble if the coffee was worth drinking," Fletcher grumbled. He dropped another quarter for Leopold and this time there was no trouble.

"Cyanide?" Leopold asked questioningly, placing the cup to his lips.

"I don't think I'd taste the difference."

But the coffee tasted the same as usual and after the first hesitant sips both of them drank freely from the cups. "You know something?" Leopold mused. "Suppose the poison was never in the coffee in the first place."

"How do you mean? They found traces in the overturned cup, didn't they?"

"Those could have been added by the killer during the confusion when Rusto was stricken. Suppose the killer had some other way of administering the cyanide. Suppose he used Rusto's dying remark about the coffee to his advantage and dropped a little poison in the cup while we worked over Rusto."

"But how did he administer the poison, Captain? That would be as impossible as getting it into the coffee without being seen."

"I suppose so," Leopold admitted. "Let's go home. Maybe things will be clearer after a night's sleep."

But in the morning as he prepared breakfast at his apartment, Leopold was surprised by the newspaper headlines: RUSTO POISONED AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS. ATTORNEY CHARGES LAXITY CAUSED CLIENT'S DEATH.

He read the account with mounting anger, aware now that Molly Calendar hadn't made good her escape from the press the previous night. They'd gotten a statement from her to the effect that ineptitude and negligence on the part of the police and the D.A.'s office had led to the death of Tommy Rusto as he was about to provide important new evidence concerning the bombing death of Mark Prior.

Leopold let the toast burn while he phoned Molly Calendar's office. It was just after nine o'clock but she was at her desk. "I was tired," she admitted. "Perhaps I was too hard on the police. But it's not every day I have a client poisoned before my eyes in a room with a detective captain and an assistant district attorney."

"I think we should have a talk," Leopold suggested. "At your office?"

"Fine. I'll be here."

Leopold arrived an hour later and was ushered into the library conference room used by members of Molly Calendar's law firm. It was a prestigious one, the city's second largest, and though she was only a junior partner Molly was highly regarded around town. Leopold sat across the polished conference table from her and said, "We have to work together if we're going to solve this thing," he told her.

"I agree, Captain. I'm not fighting you. But he was my client, after all."

"After I leave here I'm going to listen to the tape Springfield made. I might notice something we missed before."

"A good idea," she agreed.

"Do you have any ideas that might help me?"

She sighed and stared down at the table. "This is off the record but I feel I should say it. What form was the poison in?"

"Cyanide salts, most likely. There were traces in the bottom of the cup. The killer would probably have carried them in a small vial. Death was almost instantaneous, from paralysis of the heart, brain, and respiratory system."

"Does the average person, or even the average killer, carry a vial of cyanide salts around in his pocket?"

"I doubt it," Leopold said.

"Then the killer had to know in advance he'd have an opportunity to use it. I didn't know we'd be using your interrogation room with a coffee machine just outside the door. Tommy Rusto didn't know it. Springfield didn't know it. Only Jason Maxwell knew it because he was the one who asked to use it—right?"

"Right. But our room wasn't essential to the killer's plan. Wherever Rusto made his statement, he could have asked for a beverage—at least a glass of water. It doesn't have to be Maxwell, and even if it is we're still faced with the problem of how he got the poison into the coffee."

"I suppose so," she admitted reluctantly.

"I have to go now, but I really want your help. Call me if anything else occurs to you."

Leopold went next to the Hall of Justice, where he found the stenographer, Springfield, waiting for him. A quiet little man who rarely said much, Springfield had been around the courts and the D.A.'s office for years. After all that time, Leopold was surprised how little he knew about him.

"Here's the tape," he said, slipping it into the player. "I turned it off right after Rusto had his seizure. And these are my own notes that I transcribed this morning."

They listened to the tape, Leopold glancing occasionally at Springfield's notes, which listed those present and identified who was speaking. Leopold heard himself leave the room to get the coffee and then return with it. Nothing of importance had been said in his absence, but he was surprised that he seemed to be gone so long. Then he remembered that he'd had to get change from Fletcher. He'd—

"Hello, Leopold."

He turned to see Jason Maxwell enter the room. The tape had just reached the point of Rusto's seizure. Maxwell stood frozen, listening,

until it lapsed into silence and Springfield shut it off. "Find anything?" he asked Leopold.

"Not on the tape, but it got me thinking about something."

"I've been thinking too. That's why I came down here when I heard you were with Springfield. Can we talk?"

They left the stenographer's office and strode along the wide marble corridors outside the line of courtrooms. The benches were crowded with families and witnesses talking in anxious groups. It was a side of the legal process Leopold rarely witnessed. Even when he had to testify, it rarely involved the long waiting periods most people faced—the machinery of justice, grinding as slowly and uncertainly at times as the coffee machine at headquarters.

"Have you come up with an idea?" Leopold asked Maxwell.

"One. Molly Calendar. Tommy Rusto didn't have the money to pay a firm like hers. Someone else was paying her to take on the defense, probably LaGooda himself. And maybe he paid her for something else too."

"To kill him, you mean? That's ridiculous." Leopold found himself feeling surprisingly defensive toward Molly. "She could have influenced Rusto not to make a statement in the first place. She didn't have to kill him to keep him quiet. He'd surely have listened to her advice. As for the money, if LaGooda was paying the bills he'd do it through Rusto, not directly."

"Maybe," the assistant D.A. answered uncertainly.

"You know," Leopold said, "the same argument could be made about you. If Andrew Hope is involved, you're involved. Maybe you were doing him a favor to advance your own career."

"What a preposterous idea!" Maxwell exclaimed, loudly enough to turn a few heads on the benches.

"Nevertheless I may find myself in a position where I have to question the D.A."

"I can answer any questions you have for him. He didn't even see Tommy Rusto yesterday."

"Did he know the statement would be made at headquarters rather than in your office?"

"Why—yes. As a matter of fact, he's the one who suggested I call you and ask to borrow the interrogation room."

Fletcher and Ainsworth came on duty at four o'clock to find Leopold replaying the tape of Tommy Rusto's final moments. "I think

I'm onto something here," he told them. "I want you both to listen to this."

They settled down in Leopold's office. "The papers are sure making a big thing of it," Ainsworth said. "Blaming us, as usual."

"I'm beginning to lean toward the suicide theory myself," Fletcher said. "Nothing else makes sense."

Leopold took three quarters from his pocket. "Let me get us some coffee before I start the tape." He stepped into the hall and started toward the machine. "Will you help me carry it, Ainsworth?"

"Sure, Captain."

Leopold handed the first cup to Ainsworth and carried the next two in for himself and Fletcher. Then he rewound the tape to the beginning and started to play it. Fletcher and Leopold each took a sip of their coffee and Ainsworth lifted his to his lips.

At the first taste he made a face and choked. "What the hell!" The paper cup fell from his fingers and he seemed to clutch at his stomach. Leopold started to move, but Ainsworth was faster. His hand came away from his stomach gripping the police revolver from his belt holster.

Fletcher hurled himself at Ainsworth and the force of the blow tipped Ainsworth's chair over backward. As he hit the floor, Ainsworth fired one wild shot that went out the door. Then Fletcher had the gun and it was over.

"No evidence," Leopold said, shaking his head. "No real evidence, but we nailed him."

"It was a good thing you phoned me at home about your suspicions or I never would have been ready for him. He moved fast."

Leopold had already phoned Maxwell with the news, and while they waited for Ainsworth to be booked he said, "Once I knew that Hope had suggested Rusto's statement be taken here, I asked myself why. Assuming he or LaGooda had a paid killer able to reach Rusto, why could he strike best at Police Headquarters? The most likely answer was that he worked here, that he was a police officer or a detective. I imagine Hope called LaGooda and LaGooda called Ainsworth, and the trap was set. LaGooda furnished Ainsworth with the cyanide crystals to use as best he could."

"But how did you know it was Ainsworth? And how did he poison the coffee? He never went near it. He was standing outside the door the whole time."

"When I stepped out in the hall to get Rusto's coffee, I asked

Ainsworth for change. He said he had no money at all, that he'd have to make a withdrawal from the automatic teller next door. But when we drove out to LaGooda's house later he paid for his hamburger with a used five-dollar bill. But those machines only give crisp new money. Old money would jam the mechanism. Ainsworth lied about being out of change."

"Why would he do that?"

"Well, what did it cause me to do? I had to walk across the squad room to your office and ask you for change. For the space of nearly a minute I was away from the coffee machine and my back was to it. Ainsworth had overheard the conversation in the interrogation room and knew I was after coffee for Rusto—and just for Rusto. He used those crucial seconds to poison the machine."

"But how?" Fletcher demanded, staring distastefully at his own cup of coffee.

"There's a little tube that delivers the coffee to the paper cup. I was looking at it earlier. Ainsworth simply stuffed the end of that tube with cyanide crystals, wetting it first with his finger so they'd stick. They only had to stay in place for a minute, until I dropped in my quarter and the hot coffee swept them into Rusto's cup, removing all traces of the poison from the machine. Of course, he was taking a chance. If someone else, including myself, decided to get coffee and took the first cup, we'd have died instead of Rusto. But murderers have to take risks."

"And what did you do this afternoon?"

"I used salt crystals the same way, and gave Ainsworth the first cup out of the machine. When he tasted the salt in his coffee, he knew I'd guessed his method. I didn't know how he'd react, but when he went for his gun I was glad you were prepared."

Jason Maxwell appeared at the doorway, out of breath. "Ainsworth wants to make a statement. I think we're back in business!"

"No coffee for *anybody* this time," Leopold warned, starting out of his chair.

Fletcher had preceded him out of the room and he called back, "Captain!"

"What is it?"

"The coffee machine is leaking! Ainsworth shot a hole in it when his gun went off!"

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